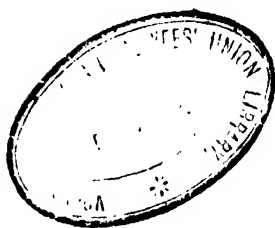


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EARLY JOYS



NO ORDINARY
SUMMER



A NOVEL IN TWO BOOKS

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE

Konstantin
FEDIN



**NO ORDINARY
SUMMER**

A NOVEL IN TWO PARTS

I

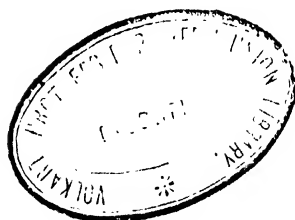


**FOREIGN LANGUAGES
PUBLISHING HOUSE**

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN
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ILLUSTRATED
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,
DESIGNED
BY E. KOGAN

NO ORDINARY SUMMER
PART ONE





* | *

GREAT historical events are accompanied not only by general excitement, finding expression in an elation or dejection of the human spirit, but also by suffering and deprivations far from the ordinary and beyond the power of man to prevent. For one who recognizes that the events taking place are part of the general movement of history, as

well as for one who is consciously guiding the course of history, this suffering does not cease to exist any more than physical suffering ceases to exist when the disease causing it is known. But such a person reacts differently to the suffering than one who does not appreciate the historical significance of events, knowing only that life today is harder or easier, better or worse, than it was yesterday or will be tomorrow. For the former, the logic of history lends meaning to his suffering; for the latter, the suffering seems to have been imposed only to be suffered, as life itself seems to have been granted only to be lived.

Vasili Danilovich Dibich, who had been a lieutenant in the tsarist army, was struggling to reach his home in the little Volga town of Khvalynsk after having been held by the Germans as a prisoner of war. The exchange of war prisoners between Germany and Soviet Russia had long since begun, but for some time Dibich was not included in those being sent home, though he did everything in his power to achieve this. As a result of a second attempt to escape from a prison camp, he had been incarcerated in the ancient Saxon fortress of Koenigstein, converted into a jail for recalcitrant and fugitive prisoners from among allied officers. Many years before, Mikhail Bakunin, a well-known Russian anarchist, had been imprisoned

in Koenigstein for having led the Dresden uprising of 1849. In discussions with French prisoners on the subject of the unsubmitiveness of the Russian character, the Russians always mentioned Bakunin, whose example inspired them with strength to endure the cruelties so exquisitely conceived by their German captors. Only in the spring of 1919 was Dibich scheduled to be sent home, but at that time he came down with a severe case of dysentery which laid him up for a month and nearly settled all his accounts in this world. He was then included in a group of sick prisoners being sent home in a Red Cross train via Poland. Throughout the entire trip he lay in a bunk suspended from the ceiling. Finally he passed through the quarantine at Baranovichi and arrived in Smolensk hardly able to stand on his feet. For a week he was kept in the hospital, and then turned loose in the world.

When he found himself in a railway station among a crowd of frantic people apparently possessed by the sole idea of ensconcing themselves behind mountains of gold and chattels, he suddenly smiled. He recalled now, four years before, as a twenty-three-year-old ensign he had been seen off to the front by his university chums, who kept repeating as they embraced him: "Till we meet again! It won't be long! Just until we win!" And

now the time had come to meet again. Once more he was standing in a Russian railway station that somewhat resembled the one from which he had entered the war. He smiled painfully as he saw himself among this crowd in his creased, stained, faded officer's uniform, shorn of his epaulettes, a green rain-wrinkled German knapsack on his back, gaunt, pinched, his eyelids inflamed from unhealed sties, unwanted, scarcely alive, alone and face to face with Russia.

A passing soldier struck him on the shoulder with a wooden box, and the shock of the blow made him conscious of a cloying weakness in the pit of his stomach—the constant, almost habitual sensation of hunger, which wailed like a taut string and caused his knees to tremble. He made his way to the wall, swung off his knapsack, and took out the hunk of soggy black bread he had been given at the hospital. He tore off the crust and began to chew it quickly, opening wide his jaws in order to pull the gummy mass off his teeth.

From that day on, Dibich kept moving south-east into the centre of Russia, toward that wedge of black earth with which he had become so familiar during his journeys to Moscow as a university student. His progress was painfully slow, proceeding from one junction to another in boxcars crowded with people or on empty flatcars. The trains

would suddenly halt and stand night after night on some siding, then as suddenly and inexplicably continue on their way, crawling through fields and woods until the engineer announced that there was no more fuel. On such occasions the passengers would grumbly climb down and make their way to the nearest woods to chop down birch trees.

As he sat in the open door of a boxcar, swinging his thin legs wrapped in blue Austrian puttees, Dibich watched the scenery unrolling in a slow kaleidoscope of ploughed fields, dark villages, steep railway embankments lined with telegraph poles on which single robins perched and sang. This was his twenty-eighth spring, and it brought him joy. He was so touched that a lump rose in his throat when, on suddenly rounding a hill, he was confronted by a vivid green ribbon of sun-drenched winter grain, already thick and high. He greedily drank in this joyous, newborn colour, as he hummed some childish tune like "Two little birdies flew away, nothing could make the birdies stay." He gazed on and on and never tired. The trees in the woods and the shoots growing out of the stumps in the clearings were mottled with shining leaves which had not yet fully unfurled. In the pastures, still without a single flower, browsed the small, unpedigreed, fat-bellied cows belonging to the peasants, while little boys, draped in the great-

coats their fathers had brought back from the front, sat in the sun braiding whips and slowly turning their heads in shaggy caps to watch the train go by. Occasionally he caught a glimpse of a woman driving a jerking harrow down the furrows, pulling hard on the long reins and flourishing a stick at the short-legged mare which seemed about to collapse at every step. While all of this was homely and familiar in every detail, it amazed him like something extraordinary, newly discovered, seen for the first time. Everything appeared to have become small and poor and shabby in comparison with his prewar recollections, yet it all had become dearer to him than ever before, gripping his very heart.

But at the stations this fondness was supplanted by perplexity at the irritating changes which had taken place in the people, making them unrecognizable in spite of their familiar appearance. They would jump out of the cars and cluster about the peasants who brought ordinary food to be exchanged for the still more ordinary possessions of soldiers and city dwellers—matches, salt, torn packages of makhorka, bits of sugar soiled from travelling about in pockets. This trade astounded Dibich by the remarkable discrepancy between value and price. He had not yet lost the habit of estimating prices according to the prewar kopek,

and his mind refused to comprehend the ease with which a whole fried chicken was bartered for a handful of salt. But the devil with such insane economics! It was not this novel cheating and swindling that was so dreadful. The dreadful thing was to be tantalized by the odour of food at these markets, to watch somebody's fingers twisting off the wing of a chicken, somebody's teeth sinking into the white meat, somebody's jaws grinding it into a pulp, somebody's Adam's apple shuttling up and down, up and down as the food went home.

Outstripped by everyone else, Dibich rushed to the army store, which was being stormed by grey uniforms. He tried to push his way to a small window where weights were clattering on the brass tray of some scales. Thrusting his documents over the heads of the others, he shouted:

"Make way for a sick man, brothers! A sick one, brothers!"

He was pushed aside.

"We're sick too."

With hard persistence he forced his way back to the window and shoved his papers under the nose of the man at the scales, pleading earnestly:

"The third day without any rations. Put yourselves in my place, comrades!"

Several people looked at his documents with hostile suspicion.

"What are you lying about? You got your bread for yesterday, didn't you?"

They tossed back his papers, but he did not give in, forcing them to take another look, demonstrating his right to a piece of bread with the exhausted glance of eyes bulging from strain, with the spasmodic twitching of a face overgrown with dark beard, with the imperiousness born of despair in his cry:

"Don't be in such a hurry to throw back the documents! Take a look! I'm a war prisoner—straight from Germany—read what's there!"

For a second it became quiet about him. Once again sharp eyes checked his papers, and then he heard someone say bitingly:

"Lieutenant! Guess you'll have to wait, your honour! We know you all right, you high and mighty officers!"

Once more they pushed him away and his elbows lacked the strength to enforce his rights.

At such moments Dibich was inclined to cut short his journey without reaching his destination, and hire himself out as a farm hand for kvass and potatoes, remaining in some village until times were better and—most important of all—until he regained his health. But the desire to see his home, his mother, and his sister, a desire which had become an obsession during his days of imprisonment,

drove him on and on, until it seemed he would be willing to crawl on all fours to his dear distant Khvalynsk if circumstances demanded.

In the evenings when the door of the freight car was shut to keep out the cold, the passengers would begin to talk. In the pitch darkness Dibich could guess who the speakers were only by the sound of their voices. From these conversations he gradually became acquainted with the new geography of his country, cut up by war fronts which kept springing up and shifting.

While still in Koenigstein he had heard rumours of two Russias which were incompatible, and the words "civil war" had then shocked the prisoners more than the word "revolution" had shocked them in 1917. On the way to his native land Dibich had learned that all the Whiteguard troops in the South had recognized General Denikin as their commander, and that Siberia was in the hands of Admiral Kolchak, who had proclaimed himself to be the supreme ruler of Russia, and that these vast forces of the South and the East (which included all the Cossacks and almost all the officers of the former Russian army) were planning to unite in the Volga region, thus forming a ring around Moscow, which kept mobilizing men into the Red Army for the purpose of defending the Soviets. Until this time Dibich had never heard of

either Denikin or Kolchak. But until the revolution he had not heard any of the names which were now blazoned on the red banners either. He was ashamed of his ignorance and tried to hide it, laying it to his backwardness and the time he had spent as a war prisoner. He was surprised to learn that the civil war was being fought in the west and north of Russia, as well as in the south and east, and that there too the White armies were fighting under generals he had never heard of, and that everywhere these White armies were being opposed by the Soviet Army, consisting of workers, sailors, and former soldiers. Now he realized why the French war prisoners in Koenigstein had accused the Russians of being unfaithful: Russia's allies had long since ceased to be her allies, and he discovered that the French, the English, the Japanese, and the Americans were interfering in Russia's affairs wherever the battle was being carried on—in the north and the south, the east and the west. He suffered embarrassment at his inability to make head or tail out of the events, but he could see that many of those to whom he listened in railway stations and on trains understood no more than he did, in spite of the fact that while Dibich had been imprisoned they had been eyewitnesses of the events, or even willing or unwilling participants in them. He felt that these events demanded that he

take some side, but he was amazingly unprepared for this. He knew only that if he said the White-guards were right, then the French who were helping them must also be right, and he could not possibly admit this, for it would mean that the Frenchmen who had attacked him in Koenigstein had also been right, and he hated them for the despicable way in which they had spoken of Russia. Everything else seemed a complete muddle to Dibich. As he listened to the talk in the darkness of the closed boxcar, he thought to himself that the world from which he came had been infinitely more clear and simple than the stormy world in which he now found himself. Formerly everyone had fought together against a single enemy, obvious to all. Now each was fighting in his own way. Brother fought brother, and one brother was your friend, the other your enemy. Oh no, he could make no sense out of the maelstrom of events. With his mind in a disturbing state of confusion, Dibich was lulled to sleep by the swaying of the train and the clean click of the wheels.

On awakening one morning he was seized by a dizzy spell of hunger. The train was standing at the large junction of Rtishchevo, a city through which he had often passed before the war. He had made it his habit to visit the station restaurant, where tables laid with snowy cloths, gleaming silver, and

a steaming plate of borsch at every place, always awaited incoming trains. The restaurant ran a training school where little Tatar boys from surrounding villages were taught to wait table. Everything was particularly attractive, appetizing, and of good quality. The very name of the station was enough to conjure up in Dibich's mind visions of a vast receding line of soup plates with golden coins of fat floating in the borsch and veils of steam wreathing above it. In front of every plate rose a mound of *pirozhki* fried to a delicate brown, while from behind vases of flowers gleamed piles of porous, snow-white bread. The Tatar boys with napkins over their arms would push back the heavy chairs in gracious invitation, and the impatient guests would hasten to take their places.

Dibich's entire body was gripped by famished longing. He glanced out of the boxcar. Not far away he could see groups of people besieging local pedlars. Overcoming his weakness, he jumped down on to the platform and joined the crush. He had made a decision which had long been tempting him: he would exchange his German knapsack for some food. He snatched it off his shoulders, stuffed the towel, sweater and bottle of drinking water which it contained into his pockets and the breast of his tunic, shook the sack, smoothed it out, and rushed into the thick of the nearest crowd.

A swarthy old Tatar woman with running, trachoma-scarred eyes, was crouched in front of a basket half covered with sacking. From the open end protruded a jar of milk curds and some fried chickens.

"I'll swap this bag for a couple of chickens," cried Dibich, imitating the liveliness of the shouts he heard about him.

The Tatar woman wiped her eyes with a corner of the kerchief on her head and continued to sit in silence.

"Well, what about it, woman? Just look what a bargain," said Dibich, with a shade of uncertainty in his voice.

The old woman took the knapsack, turned it about in her wrinkled fingers, and returned it without a word.

"What's the matter, don't you understand Russian?"

"What you mean, don't understand? Not Russian bag," said the Tatar unexpectedly.

"You're right, it's not Russian—it's a foreign bag, better than ours. See, it has an oilcloth lining. Waterproof. You can have it for a couple of chickens."

"Strap's torn," objected the old woman unperturbed.

"It's not torn, just a little bit worn in one place. You can mend it."

Once more she took the knapsack.

"Empty hole, here," she said, shaking her head.

"You can sew it up," replied Dibich, thrusting the bag onto her knees.

Unhurriedly she turned it inside out, felt the lining, examined the corners, and again returned it.

"What'll you give me for it, come on, what'll you give?" cried Dibich as he turned the bag right side out.

"Here, this chicken—nice, young," said the Tatar, pulling a fowl out of the basket.

"That's no chicken, that's a canary, you old skinflint!"

"Me no skinny flint—you skinny flint!" she retorted unmoved as she replaced the fat yellow chicken.

"Very well then," said Dibich impatiently, folding up his knapsack as though about to leave, but lacking the strength to move away or take his eyes off the chicken. "Let's have your chicken and throw in the jar of curds for good measure. Call it a bargain."

"Why jar? Jar's too big," answered the Tatar woman. "Here—cup!"

"All right, then a cupful and you can go to the devil!" said Dibich weakly, reaching for the chicken.

"Why devil? Why devil?" shouted the woman, as with an angry gesture she pulled the sacking over her wares and began to wipe her eyes, muttering in her incomprehensible tongue the while.

"Oh all right, all right—we'll leave out the devil," put in Dibich hastily, suppressing his annoyance and pulling the sacking off the chickens again.

The old woman sullenly took the knapsack, sat on it, and began to pour out the curds.

Dibich impatiently watched the rosy lumps of milk and the luscious bits of baked skin fall into the cup. He was made uncomfortable by the fact that the soldiers who had witnessed this exchange also had their eyes fixed greedily on the milk. He turned away from them as, without taking the time to swallow, he poured the cold, slippery mass down his throat.

He licked his moustache, sensing a delicate flavour which reminded him of his childhood. Then he wiped away the faint perspiration which had broken out on his forehead and strode across the square to the station. On his way, he twisted off one of the legs of the chicken with the same gesture he had so enviously observed, and was just about to put it into his mouth when he heard a joyous cry:

"Hey fellows! A train's leaving for Penza! Come on!"

He immediately joined the others in a rush toward some distant track.

The passenger train was clean and empty, apparently having just been made up. With much banging and clatter the cars were quickly occupied.

Dibich chose a top bunk for himself, crawled up, stretched out, placed his greatcoat under his elbow, and set to work on the chicken. He had not dared to dream of travelling in a passenger car with his legs stretched out comfortably in a train going straight to Penza! From there he could easily reach Kuznetsk, then Syzran, which was only a stone's throw from his home town. He tore off bits of the chicken, salted them, and chewed them up along with the soft, crunching bones. He had a vision of a large white steamer slapping its paddles through the shining water of the Volga. The green banks lay or looped like a ribbon on either side, and the happy passengers stood in silent admiration of the sunny day. From deep within the ship came the even breathing of its motor. Dibich closed his eyes as he sucked at a chicken joint, and it seemed to him that from behind a distant turning he already caught a glimpse of his native Khvalynsk, bright and peaceful, its hills and valleys blossoming with spring.

Suddenly there was a commotion around him. The air became filled with oaths and cries and

women's wails, while through it all he heard someone's furious command:

"Get out of the car, I tell you! Every last one of you! Get out of here!"

The conductor, accompanied by a guard with a rifle and a red band on his sleeve, was pushing his way through the crowd in the aisle, angrily shouting as he went:

"Who the devil ever told you this train was going to Penza? This is a special train! Get out without any back talk!"

The passengers swore and grumbled and got in each other's way as they began pulling their belongings out of the car.

Dibich frugally wrapped the remains of his chicken in a towel, climbed off of his bunk, jumped out of the car, and slowly followed the crowd down the sandy path between the tracks to the humphacked station.

* 2 *

In an endless stream of people, Dibich squeezed his way through the half-open door into the waiting room. Suddenly he felt his head swim. The entire floor was strewn with human bodies, and the thickness of the makhorka smoke made everything seem veiled in cobwebs. Against the farther wall

stood a huge buffet, grey with dust, like some dormant creature which had outlived its time and was no longer of use to anybody. Children were lying or playing on a bench near the buffet.

Dibich climbed over bundles and baskets and outstretched legs in boots or bast sandals until he reached the buffet, where he squatted down, supporting himself against the end of the bench.

Next to the window directly in front of him he saw a family whose members were so unlike everyone else that he could not keep his eyes off them.

The family consisted of a husband and wife, their son about seven years old, who had inherited his remarkable beauty from his mother, and a grey-haired woman with tiny curls at her temples, wearing amusingly old-fashioned but impressive clothes. She was not a Russian type and Dibich guessed that she was the child's governess. She was entirely absorbed in taking care of him, which meant seeing that he drank properly from a blue enamelled cup and ate little pieces of black bread spread with something or other. As soon as he had swallowed one piece she handed him another, insisting that he wash it down with a gulp from the cup, brushing off the crumbs from his knees and straightening the cup in his hands.

The husband and wife were well matched. He was still far short of forty, she very young, and

at her finest flowering. It was impossible to say to what extent her grace of manner was natural, and to what extent cultivated. Be that as it may, it was this grace which first arrested the attention. She conducted herself with charming simplicity under circumstances which were obviously incompatible with her background. On the other hand, a certain affectation could be detected in her manners: for example, she extended her little finger as she grasped a crude tin cup, and in general made a slight display of her soft and silky hands. Perhaps she intentionally exaggerated the refinement of her gestures in order to show that the crudest of circumstances could not force her to part with her gentility; or perhaps she simply wished to amuse herself and her husband with the comic incongruity of gentility in such surroundings.

It was clear that both of them had adopted a jocular attitude in order to brighten a situation which forced them to drink unpalatable boiled water from a tin cup and sit on their suitcases in the midst of this vast and seemingly ill-disposed crowd. Every once in a while they would laugh as they handed each other something from one of the suitcases which, covered with a napkin, served as a table. But from the glances they cast at the boy one could see that they were actually worried, and even a bit frightened. In spite of this veiled

uneasiness, they created the impression of people who were at heart completely happy, and made beautiful by this happiness.

Dibich involuntarily began to listen to the brief words they exchanged, and through the hum of human voices he gradually gathered what they were talking about. Not for a long time had he seen such a happy, harmonious family, and he found it strange, and sad, yet somehow satisfying that such a family had been caught up in the whirlwind which even a seasoned soldier found it difficult to weather.

"Asya," said the husband suddenly in a rather loud voice, "don't you think Olga Adamovna had better take off her brooch?"

"Her brooch?" asked his wife with surprise and curiosity, like a person expecting the answer to be most amusing.

"Her brooch," repeated the husband, blinking solemnly at the governess who immediately lifted her hand to the cheap celluloid daisy adorned by a ladybug which was fastened beneath her long chin.

"Your yearning for luxury may yet get us taken for bourgeoisie, Olga Adamovna."

"Now Sasha, do you think it's nice to make fun of Olga Adamovna like that?" said his wife, gallantly defending the older woman. But her

smile contradicted her words, indicating that of course it was delightful to make fun of Olga Adamovna.

"We're sure to get in trouble because of Olga Adamovna. She has such an aristocratic air. Just see how superciliously she looks at those soldiers!"

"You are absolutely wrong, Alexander Vladimirovich!" protested Olga Adamovna with a quick flush. "I don't look at the soldiers at all—only at my Alyosha."

"Absolutely!" mocked Alexander Vladimirovich with a short laugh. "What kind of a word is that—'absolutely'? Never heard of it! Don't you know the absolute has been cancelled? The absolute no longer exists, madame!"

"Do protect me, Anastasia Germanovna," said the governess weakly. "It tells on my Alyosha when I become upset."

"But you know he is only joking," answered Anastasia Germanovna sympathetically.

"Ah, madame, we must spare our nerves," sighed Alexander Vladimirovich. "We may find ourselves in a much worse situation. Don't get angry."

He turned away disinterestedly and cast a bored glance about him. Now Dibich had a good look at his face, which was large, with an upper lip curl-

ing fastidiously to a nose with flaring nostrils. He was clean-shaven, which was most astounding; where and when, in the dirt and confusion and inconvenience of the road, had he managed to pay attention to his face?

Suddenly the man straightened, and his narrowed glance turned in the direction of the buffet. Then he got up and, in spite of the corpulence of his figure, walked past Dibich with such a light step and easy grace that the waiting room seemed not to be crowded in the least.

The stationmaster, a man with a rusty cap on his head and an unkempt beard on his face, approached the buffet. He was sleepily showing a guard how to distribute the people and their bundles so as to leave passageways. He was trailed by a string of passengers, most of them soldiers. Fingering their worn documents, they kept calling threateningly or hopelessly, "Comrade stationmaster! Comrade stationmaster!" Apparently he had become as accustomed to this cry as to the train whistle, for he did not bother even to turn around.

Alexander Vladimirovich blocked his way by stopping directly in front of him and said very politely:

"You promised to arrange our journey to Balašov."

"No trains to Balashov," answered the stationmaster abruptly.

"Remember my speaking to you? My name is Pastukhov."

"I remember," replied the stationmaster, gazing indifferently at the leather buttons on the wide, short coat of this unusual passenger. "Nothing but troop trains being sent to Balashov."

"Maybe—with a troop train—" said Pastukhov, half enquiring, half suggesting.

"With a troop train? That's the business of the commander of the train. I can't do anything about it. Why not go to Saratov?"

"Because I'm going to Balashov!"

"Saratov or Penza," said the stationmaster indifferently, and lifted a hand to indicate that Pastukhov should step aside to let him pass.

"But I have just come from Penza!" protested Pastukhov without budging. "Why should I go back? You can hardly be serious about making such a proposal. I must get to Balashov. I have my family with me. For a day and a night we have been sitting in your station, where you don't even provide us with boiled water."

"Nothing I can do about it. Fix you up for Saratov if you like," repeated the stationmaster,

and stepped aside with the intention of detouring Pastukhov.

Immediately the crowd of soldiers who had been enviously listening to the conversation began their cries again.

"Comrade stationmaster! Comrade stationmaster!"

Once more Pastukhov planted himself in his path and said stubbornly, with an attempt to hide his annoyance:

"When all is said and done, do you intend to keep your word or not? Twice you have promised to see that my family and I get to Balashov. You yourself promised it."

"What if I did? The road has been taken over by troop trains, understand? Or aren't you capable of understanding?" shouted the stationmaster, snapping out of his weary indifference.

Pastukhov's face began to twitch.

"Be so good as not to raise your voice," he said quietly.

"Let me pass," repeated the stationmaster in the same loud voice.

"I must ask you not to shout," said Pastukhov without moving.

"Nobody's shouting. Let me pass."

"Be so kind as to arrange for me to speak with the commander of the troop train."

"That's up to you. Allow me. . ."

"Aw, cut it short!" suddenly came someone's brazen voice. "Letting off so much steam! Who do you think you are?"

A young soldier with his coat thrown across his shoulders and a voluminous bag in his hands emerged from the crowd and moved towards Pastukhov. A jovial recklessness shone in his grey, slightly bulging eyes. His fair head in a pancake cap was thrown back, and his blond eyebrows, strangely bushy for his age, kept jumping up and down with a cocksureness that was frightening.

Pastukhov tried to get rid of the soldier, but the latter thrust himself forward, quickly rolling his eyes from the stationmaster to the crowd and back again to Pastukhov.

"Just think—'My name is Pastukhov!' How did we ever get along without you for so long! Well, who do you think I am, somebody's redheaded stepchild? I'm no less a person than Ipat Ipatiev, wounded soldier, but I don't make no noise about it. Tell me to wait, so I wait. But you? 'My name is Pastukhov, hand over that Balashov!' "

● "Forget it," said an older soldier with a bland, but intelligent smile as he touched the other's elbow in a conciliatory gesture.

"Oh no I won't! I may have only one eye left, but it's enough to see what he's after in Balashov.

It's the south this barin's headed for—to hide himself under the wing of a Whiteguard general! No fooling me!" *

"I am no barin, and you have no right to speak to me in this manner," said Pastukhov slowly and impressively, like an elder addressing a child. "As to where I am to go, I hope to solve that problem without your help."

"Smart, aren't you?" cried the soldier even more brazenly, and with obvious irritation. "Well, you might as well know that you can't do nothing these days without our help!"

Dibich got up, and the crowd carried him close to the men who were quarrelling. He could see with what an effort Pastukhov was maintaining his dignity, and how this effort transformed his dignity into a pompousness which roused the curiosity and suspicion of the crowd. Everyone was worn out by a futile waiting for trains; boredom had made people weary and high-strung, and this incident promised diversion. The guard feebly waved his rifle to clear the way for the station-master. Suddenly a bass voice cried from somewhere at the edge of the crowd:

"Check his documents! Find out who he is!"

"That's right!" cried the soldier with renewed energy. "We'll check up on what he's after in Balashov!"

"What business is it of yours?" put in Dibich. "This man's travelling with his family, not interfering with anyone so far as I can see."

"You don't say! Who're you? A friend of his?"

"How dare you speak to me in that familiar tone?" cried Dibich.

The soldier swept him with a glance, then added more calmly, though still brazenly:

"Must be an officer, once you're so touchy."

"Officer or not, you have no right to be rude."

"What right have you to teach me?"

"A year at the front—that's my right!" cried Dibich in an unexpectedly shrill voice. "Two attempts to escape from war prisons—that's my right! I won my right in German prison camps, in a German fortress!"

His inflamed lids became purple, and he rubbed his hands together, clenching them into fists—now the left, now the right—as though scarcely able to keep himself from fighting. The soldier also shouted and rolled his bulging eyes.

"What you yelling about? Who do you think I am, that you can yell at me?"

"Drop it, Ipatka, drop it!" said the older soldier, once more pulling at his sleeve.

"Leave me alone!" cried Ipat. "Here, hold this!"

He pushed his bag into the hands of the older soldier and grabbed the elbow of the guard.

"Take us to the chief, comrade. The whole bunch of us. There we'll find out what's what."

"Check the documents of both of them!" came the bass voice once more.

The crowd was buzzing angrily, everyone adding his own fuel to the fire. The guard waved them off. He was anxious to have everything pass off peaceably, but the young soldier was obdurate and the crowd continued its buzzing.

Suddenly a woman's deep voice was heard:

"Just a minute, Sasha. I'm going with you! Don't go without me!"

Anastasia Germanovna pushed through the crowd, trying to reach Pastukhov. He watched her above the heads of the people. With lips that were white and stiff as with cold, he said in an off-hand tone:

"Everything's all right. Just a lot of nonsense. Go back to Alyosha."

He turned to the guard:

"Come on," he said, and he himself went first, with a determination that made the crowd fall back.

In a narrow, empty room, near glass doors through which the station platform was visible, sat a man in riding breeches reading a booklet. He glanced up as the people entered, placed a burnt

match between the pages, and stood up, his feet planted wide apart.

"Who are these people?" he asked the guard unhurriedly.

"Got into a quarrel."

"His honour here is bound for Balashov," said Ipat sarcastically, jerking his thumb in the direction of Pastukhov. Then he turned to Dibich: "And this one, who says he was a war prisoner in Germany, comes to his defence. The people are suspicious."

"Who are you? The people?" asked the chief.

"Yes," replied the soldier seriously. "Ipat Ipatiev, formerly a corporal in the Tomsk regiment, Battalion 3, Company 12. A volunteer in the Red Army. Seen action. Released as wounded."

"What was your wound?"

Ipat lifted his head, rolled up his blue eyeballs, and pointed to his left eye with the same gesture of his crooked thumb with which he had indicated Pastukhov:

"A splinter right in the ball, beings as which I lost the sight of it completely. Here—just a tiny speck."

"Well, step outside. If I need you, I'll call you," said the chief.

He moved over to the desk which was spread with a newspaper ornamented with blots and

scrawls, and had pieces torn off all around the edges. He pulled a silk tobacco pouch as large as a pillowcase out of his pants pocket, untied it, tore another bit off the edge of the newspaper, and set about rolling himself a cigarette.

"Got a flint?"

"Used up my last one."

Pastukhov struck a match. In the flare, the yellow glance of the chief darted out sharply from under his brows, dying out along with the match.

"Your documents?"

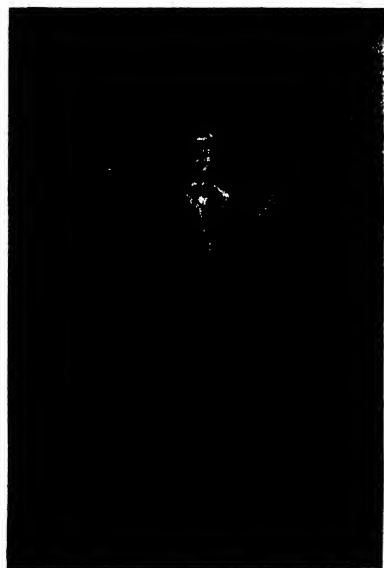
Pastukhov took out his wallet. The chief exhaled a thin stream of smoke as he read the paper attentively: the People's Commissar of Education certified that the well-known playwright Pastukhov was travelling with his family to his wife's home in the Balashov uyezd, and requested that all institutions and local authorities render him every possible assistance along the way.

"How about treating a fellow to a smoke?" said the guard.

"What's all the trouble about?" enquired the chief, pushing over his tobacco pouch without taking his eyes off the paper.

"He wants the stationmaster to ship him off, and the stationmaster says there's no trains going."

The chief folded the paper unhurriedly and looked at Pastukhov.



"The stationmaster's not God," he said.

"Who is?" asked Pastukhov with a faint smile.

"God's been put out of office," drawled the guard with satisfaction as he helped himself to a generous pinch of makhorka.

"Why do you want to go to Balashov?"

"For food. There is famine in Petrograd."

A minute passed in silence, during which the chief sat thinking and scratching his ear while the guard struggled to get a light from the former's cigarette, spilling down sparks in the process. Pastukhov and Dibich waited submissively. Finally the guard, who was now wreathed in smoke like the depot itself, said:

"They want to get down closer to them wheat-fields. Smother the peasants out, that's what they'll do. Tsk, tsk, tsk! Him in kid gloves, her under a parasol, but it's the peasant as does the ploughing."

"You going to Balashov too?" asked the chief turning to Dibich.

"No. To Khvalynsk."

"So what are you so anxious to help them for?"

"Out of sympathy. It will soon be a month since I was released from a war prison, and still I haven't reached home. It's no fun cooling your flanks on these station floors."

He handed over his document covered with stamps and seals. The chief turned it in his hands, trying to decipher the hieroglyphics, then gave it back disinterestedly and addressed Pastukhov:

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Put me on a troop train, damn it all!" exclaimed Pastukhov in desperation. He felt that the moment had come to demand what he wanted. "There are three in my family, besides an old woman who takes care of my son. Shove us in somewhere, if it's only on the platform of a car."

"I'll see what I can do," said the chief with a short laugh.

He carefully restored his pouch and booklet to the voluminous pocket of his pants and nodded toward the door.

Pastukhov followed him out onto the train platform.

A strong wind blew from the steppes, causing him to hold on to his hat. He leaned into the wind as he walked, falling behind the chief and staring at the latter's strange, flopping breeches. It was clear that he was a good-natured chap, once his subordinates disposed so unceremoniously of his tobacco. Pastukhov thought it would be a good idea to say something amusing—nothing like a witty comment to win favour with the powers that be—

but his mind had become amazingly dull during this journey. It was a pity that this reader of booklets, who was probably meeting a live writer (and a Petrograd one at that) for the first time in his life, should not hear him utter a single clever word.

On a distant track stood a freight train made up of boxcars and flatcars loaded with supplies and machine guns. Sentries were dozing on munitions crates while orderlies swept out the horse cars, from which came the pungent odour of fresh manure.

With a request that Pastukhov wait for him, the chief climbed through the smoke-blackened door of the staff car.

Pastukhov looked out over the fields. They stretched as far as the eye could see, green in some places, black where the furrows ran in even, harmonious rows. But mostly they consisted of endless expanses of steppeland, not yet roused from their winter's slumber. A wind from the east brought the chill of distant gulleys and the acrid odour of last year's weeds, now decomposing in the sun. The elated lark soared trillingly into the vault of heaven, then plunged back like a stone. Motionless the sky; motionless the earth. Only the dark hayricks stirred, from time to time sending off tufts of hay into the wind.

Slowly from the depths of his memory arose lines written by a poet whom Pastukhov considered the last Russian genius of the nineteenth century, and with a sigh he spoke them aloud, fastening his glance on the scarcely visible horizon:

*"Our road leads through the steppes; our road
leads through endless sorrow,
Thy sorrow oh Russia!..."*

The sound of voices caused him to turn around. Red Army men were singing in the open door of the boxcar. Some stood with their arms on each other's shoulders; others sat swinging their bare feet over the edge, kicking at one of their comrades who was squatting beside the tracks polishing his messkit.

"His comrades, those with whom he laboured..." began the low voices, gradually growing in volume as they climbed from step to step until one silver voice leaped to the very top of the ladder: "Slept 'neath the oak trees he-e-e-d-less!" Once more the basses began to roll and climb, and again the trilling tenor vaulted to a note beyond their reach: "h-e-e-e-d-less..." And as he sang this penetrating "ee-ee" the bare feet of the Red Army men gave the fellow squatting alongside the tracks such a push that he tumbled down

the embankment with his messkit clattering after him. The men stopped singing and burst into roars of laughter. Suddenly they jumped out of the car, young and merry, with their unbelted tunics blown out by the wind.

The tenor's "h-e-e-d-less" kept ringing in Pastukhov's ears, and as he listened to that thin, vixenish "ee," he for some reason thought to himself: "Heedless—that's it, heedless—as heedless as the song of the lark, and therein lies the secret of everything." Suddenly, and quite incongruously as it seemed to him, he recalled a Professor Shlyapkin whose lectures he had attended at the university. The professor was of serf origin, having managed by his own efforts to win a respectable position in society and even to accumulate a little money. Once he felt himself secure, he set up a tiny bust of Alexander II at his summer house in Finland, placing beneath it the inscription: "To the Tsar, Emancipator—from the grateful Shlyapkin." The thought came to Pastukhov that here was a tale with which he could amuse the chief, and he burst out laughing. While he was laughing and enjoying the sight of the merry soldiers, down the road came a round little Tatar all bundled up in quilted clothes and looking for all the world like Professor Shlyapkin. And now Pastukhov remembered that he had made a mistake about the inscription,

that it had read: "To the Tsar-Emancipator—from the Emancipated." But he continued to laugh and decided that "from the grateful Shlyapkin" sounded funnier.

At that moment someone called to him. He was being summoned to the staff car by a bright-faced, red-moustached commander, beltless, with a revolver swinging from a narrow strap over his shoulder.

"Are you the one wanting to get his family to Balashov?"

"Yes. I hope you will be so kind as to let us go in your troop train."

"Why should I assume a responsibility like that? There's fighting going on there."

"There's fighting going on everywhere," said Pastukhov.

"You don't call this fighting, do you? This is just disorder," replied the commander condescendingly. "No, I'm sorry, but you'll have to manage some other way."

"In other words, you refuse?"

"That's right."

"Well then, goodbye," said Pastukhov with an offended air, but actually feeling strangely relieved.

He returned to the station in a mood that was almost joyful. That incongruous phrase kept hammering in his head: "the grateful Shlyapkin."

He faced his family with a smile. All three of them glanced at him in silent alarm.

"Daddy," said the boy, sidling up to him shyly, "they aren't going to shoot you, are they?"

Olga Adamovna quickly hid her face in her hands and her curls began to tremble.

"What for?" asked Alexander Vladimirovich seriously, and a bit upset. "They shoot rabbits. And bears. They shoot partridges."

"But when there's a war?"

"Well, when there's a war.... But you don't call this a war, do you? This is just disorder!"

He glanced at his wife. She was sitting up very straight and pretty in her fright. Her eyes were wet. He sank down beside her on the suitcase and began playing with her soft fingers as he said:

"Asya, we must go to Saratov."

Then he raised his head and glanced beyond the dusty, cheerless window.

* 3 *

Work was like smoking for Pastukhov. Everything about him became hateful if he could not be alone with his pen and paper some three hours a day.

"Like taking the sickle out of the hands of a reaper at harvest time," he said irritably to Asya

when she, having sensed his unhappiness, laid her hand gently on his shoulder.

He tried turning a valise upside down on his knees and scratching something down in pencil. But a group of passengers had gathered about a trunk beside him and were having a noisy game of cards. They swore and roared and muttered incomprehensibly, like the monsters in Tatyana's nightmare.

Olga Adamovna put her hands over Alyosha's ears, blushed and blanched in turn, and cast a beseeching look at Alexander Vladimirovich, but he only shrugged his shoulders and said:

"Have to get used to it, madame!"

"Oh, I have already adjusted myself, but my poor little boy!"

The car was as packed with people as a pot of sliced potatoes. There was no choice of seats; one sat down wherever he got pushed, while at every new station the number of passengers increased. They consisted of Red Army men on furlough for medical treatment, muzhiks from surrounding villages, refugees from the Ukraine, Moscovites being sent on various missions, fugitives from the famine in the cities, and even a group of Austrian war prisoners. Three rows of bare feet hung over the edge of the sleeping bunks, while snoring people huddled under the benches.

All of this seethed and simmered like hot porridge, and was in addition besieged by swarms of flies. Yet no one felt outraged; rather, each was content that he was moving from something worse to something better, as is always the case when people travel of their own free will. So conversation hummed along in a lively manner.

When the train stopped at Atkarsk, Pastukhov managed to climb out to get some hot water. Everybody stared as he walked past with his polished copper coffee-pot held at arm's length, afraid of scalding himself or spilling the water over his light suit. He met Dibich standing in line for the hot water and invited him to have tea with them.

After settling themselves in makeshift fashion, they gratefully watched the lovely hands of Anastasia Germanovna portion out teaspoonfuls of sugar and cut the bread with a penknife, while her quiet, radiant smile seemed to say that after all it was really quite a lark to be making a trip in this vile smelling car with all the flies and the cardplayers, knowing nothing of what awaited you, headed for a town to which you had never intended to go. Quite a lark, that is, if you had the proper society manners and could curve your little finger in the charming way in which she did it.

"So you're from Khvalynsk?" asked Alexander Vladimirovich. "I am also from Khvalynsk. The Pastukhovs—ever heard of them? Well, of course my late father moved away many years ago and I myself haven't been there since I was a boy. We weren't very well known in the town. Once we owned an estate in that uyezd, but one doesn't mention such things these days."

He squinted knowingly at Dibich. As he unscrewed the top of his flask he recalled how in his Petrograd study he had been wont to draw the attention of his guests to the bird's-eye maple furniture and say:

"A relic of Khvalynsk. My grandfather's. My father squandered the estate away—nothing left but this."

At present the entire house, including the bird's-eye maple, had been abandoned in Petrograd, and Pastukhov was annoyed that his memory should remind him of this unpleasantness. By nature he was one who could not bear any sort of unpleasantness.

"The blood of a witch is to be found in this magic flask," he said mysteriously as he poured a bit into Dibich's tea. "I dumped the dregs of every bottle in the sideboard into this flask—cognac, rum, vodka, and liqueurs. Believe it or not, when I shook it up—f-f-f-t!—it started siz-

zling. One tablespoonful of this stuff and the devil goes chasing through your blood."

Dibich took a swallow of the tea and waited for the reaction. Presently his brows went up in some surprise: sure enough, a wonderful warmth such as he had not felt in a long time stole through his veins. Pastukhov laughed delightedly.

"I say," he said in a familiar tone as though addressing an old acquaintance, "you must have gone through a lot with those Germans, eh? If it isn't too painful to remember it all, I'd like to hear about it. At least the most important things."

"The most important?" repeated Dibich musingly. "I don't know what I shall call 'the most important' ten years from now—if I live that long and if the matter is still of any interest. Maybe by that time we shall love the Germans. Or maybe I shall have forgotten everything. At present I remember only two feelings that were always with me: the desire for food and the desire to run away. They were the most important things."

"Not homesickness?"

"Of course I was homesick. Well, not exactly homesick. Naturally I longed to get back; you only really learn to appreciate your native land when you're away from it. But most of all I wanted to see things to a finish, to a complete finish."

"What things?"

"The war. Can you imagine how terrible it felt at times to realize that everything might be in vain?"

"In vain?"

"That's it. That all of this destruction might be for nothing. That feeling began when I was still at the front. People endured so much—I saw it all with my own eyes . . . mincemeat made out of human beings! Sometimes you couldn't distinguish one thing from another—mud and blood, sticks and bones—everything mixed up. For a long time I was sure we'd finish them off. But I wanted terribly to do it myself, with my own hand."

Dibich clenched his boney fist and banged it in desperation against his sharp knee. He was crouched low on his folded coat, so that his knees were as high as his chest. The beard bristled on his sunburnt face when he became excited.

"As soon as I fell into their hands I swore to run away. They starved us. Out of meanness, not necessity. If they had given us prisoners only one-tenth of what we earned—let's say, of potatoes! But they never fed us anything but beets. The same annihilation of human beings there as at the front. They assigned us a section of the cemetery—I was sent to Gross-Poritsch, not a very large camp—about three thousand prisoners—and every morning we hauled bodies off to be buried. Some of

them couldn't stand the beets and died of stomach trouble, others couldn't endure the abasement and took their own lives. Almost every night we would cut down men who had hung themselves with their belts out at the latrines, begging your pardon," he added in lowered voice with a glance at Anastasia Germanovna. "In those days I was certain we would get even with the German devils for all that, and I ran away. A young ensign went with me that time."

"Tell me all the details," said Alexander Vladimirovich, settling himself as comfortably as possible.

"It's simple enough: a Russian feels as though he had a noose around his neck when he's captive. The French are different. In the officers' barracks we were half and half—French and Russian. As soon as a Frenchman landed there, he set about making himself at home—finding a wooden peg to hang his cap on, making a coat hanger for his uniform—turned his barracks into a regular Paris salon. Girls on the wall, sand under his feet, packages from the Red Cross, selling and exchanging stuff. . . . The Frenchmen would laugh and sing their songs, in Latin or French, gay as marches. And they kept sewing and polishing their things, always busy at something or other. But the Russians would sit for hours gazing at a cloud in

the sky, and if they sang, it was enough to break your heart. To be sure, sometimes they would suddenly get a jolly mood on and break into a dance that set the floor creaking. But then they would relapse into their sitting and staring, and this would go on for a week at a stretch. Well, I did my share of sitting and staring, and then decided to make a break. It was clear I would have to wait until the grain stood high in the fields and the ears were ripe. I volunteered to work—officers weren't compelled to. Went out into the fields along with the rank and file and helped hoe beets. There I took note of my surroundings: at the end of our field was a thin little wood, carefully laid out, like everything with the Germans—you could see right through it. Beyond the wood, a narrow-gauge railway track, with a field of grain on the other side. I began to purposely linger behind, as though I couldn't keep up with the others, and I noticed that there was an ensign, also from the officers' barracks, who managed to hang behind even further than me. Soon we came to an understanding, and in order not to spoil things for each other, we decided to try our luck together. At first they kept a sharp eye on us, but then they gave it up. The *Landsturmann* from the guards used to laugh at us and say that apparently officers weren't made to do

the work of peasants. We agreed with him—said our backs weren't used to being bent. We made our break half an hour before quitting time—in the evening, just before roll call. We figured it would take us no more than fifteen minutes to run through the wood, cross the railway, and bury ourselves as deep as possible in the grain. When the roll call showed that we were missing, the guards would first have to see the prisoners back to camp, and while they were doing this and arranging a hunt, it would get dark, giving us a chance to hide ourselves carefully somewhere not far away where we would spend the night. Usually runaways try to cover as much ground as possible, but I convinced my companion that, on the contrary, we should remain in the neighbourhood at first, letting the searchers get farther and farther away, fooling them by remaining behind instead of being up ahead. Everything turned out just as we had planned. Scarcely had we hidden ourselves in the grain than the alarm was given: the guards shot into the air and shook wooden rattles like those we use to frighten birds out of the orchards. But lucky for us a freight train came crawling along with its bell clanging—the bells are worked by steam, so that once they start going there's no end to the noise. The bell kept the villagers from paying much attention to the alarm.

But we heard it all right; our ears were working harder than anything else. The night passed quietly. We lay in a hollow in the middle of the field, and at dawn we ate some of the grain that hung ripe all around us and stuffed our pockets with it. The tracks we had left on crawling through the field might have given us away, but again luck was with us: a breeze rose at sunrise, straightening out the flattened grain, so that we hid there safely the whole day. The only thing we minded was our thirst—we had brought just a little water with us in an Eau de Cologne bottle—a gift from the Frenchmen. We left at nightfall, and during our first march crossed the mountains along the Austrian border—a dream of a place. In the morning we found ourselves in a valley again, and again we hid in a grain field. Now we were in Bohemia. We figured we would feel more free among the Czechs, and even hoped they would take us in. But still we were afraid to show ourselves. So we continued to hide in the fields during the day and make our way at night. We avoided settlements—whenever we saw lights, we made a detour. We were pretty weak by the fifth day—hadn't had a crumb of bread—nothing but raw grain. I was still all right—I was husky in those days—but my ensign began saying wouldn't it be better for us to give ourselves up, we'd only be caught anyway,

or else die out in the fields. When it was time to start out in the evening he'd be like a stone—no raising him. By morning he'd be going pretty good, but soon he'd collapse and fall asleep. Well, one noon, just a week after we had set out, we were lying in the bushes at the edge of a meadow where some cows were browsing, when one of the animals wandered into our bushes. A large, fat creature it was, with udders the size of a pail and milk dripping from the teats. I looked the cow straight in the eye, as much as to say: 'You won't give us away, will you, honey?' And she gave me back a heartfelt glance with a tear in her eye, much as to say: 'Go right ahead—I understand perfectly,' and turned around to munch the bushes. I crawled under her, placed my mouth under the teat, and began to milk. I became dizzy drunk. I kept swallowing away with the warm milk running into my collar and all over me. I got cramps in my fingers, but still I kept on milking. The ensign slipped over to me and whispered, 'Move over, let me have some.' I said, 'Lie down on the other side.' He crawled over, but my head was in the way and he couldn't manage. So then I stopped drinking, put him under, and began milking into his mouth like into a pail, two teats at once. But just then I heard steps. 'Quit it,' I said. 'Get away,' and crawled off into a hollow. But he started

fumbling with the udder as though he hadn't heard anything. There was a rustling in the bushes right next to him. Suddenly I saw a young fellow in a pointed cap, apparently the shepherd, glance through the bushes and turn to stone on seeing a man sucking the cow. Before I had time to decide which was better, to speak to him or to remain in hiding and watch his reaction, he had sprung back and broken into a run. And that was the end of our journey. We kept lying there in the thickets, but we could hear voices all around coming closer and closer. They found us—there was nowhere to run. I thought to myself: 'It's a good thing Czech peasants have found us—at least they won't beat us.' I began talking to them in Russian, but they just shook their heads, as much as to say: 'That's all very well, but be good enough to get into the cooler.' I thought they would hold us a while just for the looks of the thing, and then give us a chance to get away. But just as the crowd of us were approaching the village I looked up to see a gendarme on a bicycle—an Austrian. Well, you can imagine how this changed the situation. What I minded most was that he was an Austrian. During our advance in 1916 I used to capture those spindly-legged creatures like fish in a dragnet. My battalion alone shipped off almost a thousand of them to Russia. And here was I—well, you can

imagine! They sent us hotfooting it back to Gross-Poritsch, locked us up in a penalty barrack, took my weapon away from me. . . ."

"What do you mean—your weapon?" interrupted Pastukhov.

Dibich stopped, thought for a second, then pulled a red ribbon out of his breast pocket. Pastukhov took it, and after a brief examination handed it to his wife.

"The ribbon of the Order of St. Anna, remember, Asya? Used to wear it on the sword."

Anastasia Germanovna took the ribbon reverently in her soft fingers and let Alyosha touch it.

"Some of them had a white tassel at the end," remarked Alyosha.

"I took off the tassel," said Dibich.

"Didn't you like it?" asked Alyosha, and everybody smiled.

"That means you were decorated?" asked Pastukhov.

"Yes, not long before I was taken prisoner. Awarded a cranberry. That's what we used to call this ribbon—a cranberry. I was taken prisoner in a battle for a height. The Germans spent a lot of time taking it away from us; they broke up my battalion, but until I was wounded neither I nor those with me would surrender. The Germans left me my sword. But the commandant in the camp

was a coward and took even the swords away from the officers, leaving them only the ribbons. The ribbons, he said, were like receipts—when the war was over we could show them and be given back our swords. Before trying to make my escape I sewed the ribbon into my sleeve, but the tassel was so thick I had to tear it off. I sewed it here—do you know what the Germans did to war prisoners?—cut out pieces of their sleeves and substituted them with red arm bands. There was no tearing those bands off, so I decided it would be a good place to hide the ribbon. One of the Frenchmen gave me a needle. The Frenchmen had everything including knives, but even a toothbrush is dangerous in the hands of a Russian prisoner. Well, when they caught me the commandant announced that as a penalty for attempted escape they would deprive me of my weapon, and asked me to return the ribbon. I said I had lost it. For three days they gave me nothing to drink. They ripped all the seams of my clothes, but as for the ribbon—well, here it is!” exclaimed Dibich with boyish pride.

Pastukhov laughed in amazed admiration.

“That’s a Russian for you!” he cried. “I can understand how even a toothbrush is dangerous in such hands. You put it well. And we’re always running away! That’s our nature. Everybody runs

away—dissenters, girls about to be married, students, convicts, the Tolstoy! Have you ever thought about this? For the sake of a better way of life. For the sake of happiness, of freedom, of a myth, of fame. From the city to the forest, from the forest to the city. A strange people,” he concluded, gazing curiously at the crowd in the train.

“And we’re also running away,” said Asya with a shy smile.

“Yes—but why?” put in Pastukhov.

“What do you mean—why? On the trail of ‘taters and tomaters,” replied Asya with mock practicality, giving everyone to know that without losing her ethereal smile she could be as earthy as any country wench.

“Well, and what then? You made a second attempt at escape? No clipping your wings, it seems,” said Pastukhov.

Dibich’s face went grey and moisture glistened on his brow. His wasted body rocked back and forth as he glanced at the bread.

“Hm,” he said, compressing his lips. “Impossible to tell everything. The second time I tried my luck alone. It seemed to me that I’d have made my getaway the first time if it hadn’t been for my companion. But I had no luck the next summer either. I got as far as Boden Lake. That’s

a good distance. Wanted to reach Switzerland. They found me when I was already in a boat—caught me in the beam of a searchlight—and shipped me off to a fortress.”

Dibich broke off and wiped his brow with a shaking hand.

“Think this’ll go on long?” he asked, casting a dull glance at the crowd.

“Don’t know, but it looks as though it wouldn’t end very soon.”

“Can you explain what it is? What’s happening? Not in abstract terms—there are plenty of terms—but so as to be understood?”

Pastukhov narrowed his eyes as he looked through the window. The bushes and mileposts did not flash or spin past, but listlessly crawled away as if unable to make up their minds whether to remain where they were or follow the windows. With a great effort the train climbed a slope, pulling at its screeching couplers.

“Sometimes I think I understand everything,” said Pastukhov slowly. “And at other times I am unable to make sense out of things which seem perfectly obvious. Perhaps only one thing is incontrovertible: now it is the entire people, and not just dissenters or Tolstoys that have risen up on their hind legs and broken into a run. For a better way of life. For a myth.”

"For 'taters," put in Asya by way of correction, but this time her smile was cheerless.

"A continuation of Russian history, and very possibly..." Pastukhov, paused for a second then concluded emphatically, "not only of Russian history, but of the history of mankind as a whole."

"A painful history," said Asya, still cheerlessly.

"It is hard for me to understand what is happening," said Pastukhov, "because of the peculiarities of my make-up. Not that I lack brains. But I am too sensitive. That is a tragedy. The tragedy of an artist. And I must tell you that I am an artist. In order to be an artist it is necessary to be supersensitive, otherwise you will not perceive the world. But the more sensitive a person is, the more he suffers, for an artist always perceives the world through some isolated phenomenon, and he is unable to wrench his gaze from that phenomenon. It is not human suffering as an abstract concept that he sees—do you understand me?—but the living individual who is suffering. Here, I see you now, do you understand? Not some general individual, but you, making the escape you told me about, in that uniform of yours with the prisoner's arm band into which you sewed the ribbon. And you stand in the way of my seeing the whole world, at least at the given moment—understand?

—at the given moment I am able to see nothing but you. For me you are the whole world. And I cannot talk in abstract concepts, I cannot speak in generalities, I cannot answer you by saying what will take place in general. Probably I can only say what will happen to you. You will have a bad time of it. It seems to me that you will have a very bad time of it.”

Dibich started back slightly, and covered his face with his hand; his elbow could be seen to tremble against his knee.

“Oh, Sasha! What a dreary prophet you are!” exclaimed Asya. “Please don’t believe him, I beg you not to! He never prophesies anything correctly!”

It seemed as though Dibich was about to cry: he twitched almost convulsively, wanting to remove his hand from his face but unable to do so. At last it seemed to fall away of itself and hang beside his other hand, between his knees. He went moist and grey again as he said quickly and apologetically:

“Could you let me have another piece of bread?... I’m not feeling so well ... after that tea...”

A second passed in tense silence. Then Pastukhov seized the bread, tore off a piece and held it out, almost pushing it into Dibich’s hand.

"And by all means have another swig of this devil's potion—here, by all means!" he said, hurriedly pouring a drink from the flask in his embarrassment.

Asya dropped her eyes and a blush flooded her cheeks and her delicate temples and forehead, making her all the more blooming and lovely.

Dibich began to chew in his quick manner, and there was something bestial in his greed, some exposure, as though he had suddenly stood up before them in hairy nakedness.

The frightened Olga Adamovna hastened to place herself between him and Alyosha.

* 4 *

After the crowd had somewhat dispersed, the Pastukhovs hauled their baggage out onto the square in front of the station. Alexander Vladimirovich took off his coat, wiped his brow, glanced with disgust at his dirty hands, and laughed at some thought that struck him.

"Welcome home, damn it all!" he said to his wife. "Here I am in my native haunts!"

A row of shabby brick barracks lined the long, straight street; down the middle of the road strung a procession of people with sacks on their backs; the eternal sparrows flashed off the pavements like

bullets; closed shops still vaunted signs in tarnished gold—"Tea—Coffee—Sugar." On top of the bags and bundles piled on the cobblestones lay Olga Adamovna's colourful work basket and a string bag containing Alyosha's toys: a mechanical bicyclist, a coloured ball, an aeroplane, and a picture book.

"Stupid of me to have lost track of all my acquaintances," said Pastukhov. "In the nine years that have passed there is probably not a soul left."

"I tell you, Sasha, you must go right to the highest authorities. That's always best," advised Asya in a quiet tone, but with profound conviction.

"Forget it! What do high authorities care about my suitcases?"

"Not your suitcases, but you! Tell them who you are, show them your papers, and..."

"Papers? Who do you think I am—a member of the Revolutionary Military Council? Food Commissar? Representative of the People's Economic Council?"

He snorted and walked over to the station entrance. Near by he saw a grey-bearded man in a shiny coat and faded hat, beneath which protruded unkempt locks of hair as grey as his beard. In spite of his antiquated appearance, he emanated a strange liveliness. He looked like a scientist, or perhaps the keeper of archives for the gubernia.

Mendeleyev and a clerk in one. The old man's glance was a mixture of mischief and decorum. He looked at Alyosha like a little boy who had decided to make his acquaintance but was not yet sure whether anything would come of it. Suddenly he sidled up to him and said with a lift of his brows:

"Where might we be going, eh?"

Olga Adamovna immediately took Alyosha's arm and drew him toward her, but the child answered simply, without the slightest hesitation:

"We've already arrived. But daddy hasn't decided where to live yet."

"Exactly," burst out Pastukhov.

"Forgive me for speaking to the boy," said the old man with a blush as he lifted his hat and lowered his voice in a manner befitting one who is familiar with the rules of good breeding. "He is an unusually handsome child."

"Oh I don't think so," exclaimed his mother, also blushing as she glanced at Alyosha and raising her hand to her face so that the stranger should not see her pleasure.

"So you want to live in Saratov?" said the old man, once more addressing Alyosha.

"We live in Petrograd," replied Alyosha severely.

Alexander Vladimirovich gave a short laugh.

"In a sense we are refugees from the capital. Running away from our own selves. And here everything is strange, although I was born in these parts. Pastukhov is my name. Ever heard of it?"

"Pastukhov? You? You don't say! The very same? Of course. I understand. Just to think! Just to think!" exclaimed the old man, asking and answering his own questions. "Now I recognize you. What a remarkable coincidence! Well, well, very pleased indeed. Allow me to introduce myself: Arseni Romanovich, Dorogomilov, resident of your native town, as it turns out."

He quickly shook hands with everyone. His manner was strangely contradictory: the more excitedly he spoke, beginning to stutter and mix up his words in his confusion, the more simple and genial he became.

"I was right—fame always comes in handy," said Asya, a subtle irony behind her triteness.

"Perhaps you could advise me where to put up, at least for the present?" asked Pastukhov.

"Yes indeed—very simple—for the present, for example, you can put up at my house," exclaimed Dorogomilov. "In my apartment. That is, of course, if you find it convenient. For a week I've been coming here to the station to meet some old friends, but they don't arrive. Two weeks ago I re-

ceived a telegram saying they were leaving. Coming from Moscow. Just think! But there is plenty of room in my government house. I am all alone."

"What do you mean—a government house?" enquired Pastukhov.

"Oh, dear me!" laughed the old man. "I get my apartment from the government, the city government. The house belongs to the city. I was head bookkeeper for the city administration for thirty-five years—yes, yes, that's the truth!—and now I hold the same position. Only now it is called the Communal Administration Department."

"Will I have my own room?" asked Alyosha.

"You'll have a villa with a fountain and equipage," said his father sternly.

"But he *will* have his own room," said the old man, bending toward Alyosha with serious concern. "Mother and father will have the large room, adjoining which there is a small one. There you will live with . . ." here he made an uncertain bow to Olga Adamovna, "if you wish."

"Did you say it was a communal apartment?" asked Asya, not without some dread.

"Not at all! The house is communal, belonging to the city, but I am the only one occupying the apartment, just as it used to be. For the present—without any changes for the present."

"But we shall be in your way!" said Asya, touched and grateful, with a tear in her eye and a slight curve of her lips.

"Goodness no! Why I... You can be sure that I shall be more than glad. I have two other rooms. I occupy a whole floor. A whole floor! The city always provided me with an apartment. I can't even remember how long I have been living there!"

"Fantastic!" said Pastukhov.

"Fate?" queried Asya with a smile.

He nodded confirmation.

"So you agree?" said Dorogomilov, turning rapturously to all of them and suddenly snatching the hat off his head like a sailor who has unexpectedly sighted long-awaited land.

Alyosha immediately repeated the gesture with his white summer cap.

"Mother agrees, mother agrees!" he cried.

"What are you shouting about?" observed his father without being angry in the least.

"Well, now we'll have to haul your baggage. Let's go find a cart," said Dorogomilov, holding out his hand to Alyosha.

Immediately Olga Adamovna bristled and came forward, pulling about her a dusty plush coat in imitation of sealskin.

"But you mustn't! Alyosha has scarcely made your acquaintance!"

"Oh we'll get acquainted all right, we'll get acquainted! I'll be right back! Just a minute!"

Dorogomilov ran off to the far end of the station where remnants of the passengers were still pattering about their belongings. He walked with jumpy little steps, his baggy trousers making his legs look like sausages beneath the flowing folds of his frock coat. His hair fluttered beneath his hat, and he pushed one shoulder forward as he walked as though cleaving the air. Alyosha laughed in delight and began hopping on one foot.

"He's like that on purpose, isn't he, mother? Like a Christmas tree ornament."

"He's an-te-qua-rian," said Pastukhov with a mischievous wink at Asya, after which he burst out laughing. "Damn it all! Never heard of anything like it!"

"Believe me, Sasha, I am sure I am not making a mistake when I say he's a guardian angel sent to help us on our journey," said Asya with an inspired, radiant look. There was a little catch in her voice as she pronounced the word "angel."

"Or a madman," snapped Pastukhov.

An hour and a half later the little procession approached the house of Dorogomilov. The old man held Alyosha's hand while Olga Adamovna, who was more excited than anyone else, followed at his heels. Two workmen were wheeling the bag-

gage along the road in pushcarts while the Pastukhovs walked behind on the sidewalk.

The house in which Dorogomilov lived was located on one of the quiet streets leading from the Volga to the city boulevard called Lipki. It was a two-storey plaster house with crumbling foundations; its once pink façade had faded to a brownish hue etched with picturesque cracks. The house was easily remembered for the porch of the main entrance, which extended out to the very sidewalk. A few panes of coloured glass which had not yet been broken by the boys of the neighbourhood glittered in the fancy door and window frames of this porch. The other features of the house were typical of architectural taste in provincial cities and towns some hundred and fifty years ago: Venetian windows in the second storey with oval frames matching the frame of the front door; pilasters extending from foundation to cornice, so flat that they seemed to be only painted on. The only thing about the wing to the left and the gateway to the right which distinguished them from those of the neighbouring houses were the surrounding acacias, already bursting into leaf.

Arseni Romanovich disappeared through the gateway and a minute later breathlessly opened the front door. The workmen began carrying in the baggage. Alyosha was the first to run up the

musical wooden steps, and land at the window in the corridor. What he saw surpassed all his expectations. Far from exaggerating the wonders which the new quarters would open up to Alyosha, the descriptions Arseni Romanovich had given as they walked from the station to the house had not even approached the fabulousness of the world which was now spread at the boy's very feet.

A large garden sloped down from the house. Some of the trees had already put forth young leaves, others were covered with bursting buds and hanging blossoms like red velvet caterpillars. But already the garden seemed blooming. Spots of sun trembled on the narrow paths like little yellow chickens. Here the grass grew in tiny blades, as even as though clipped with scissors, there it mingled with curly, flop-eared weeds. An old wheelbarrow with a broken wheel lay on its side. "We'll fix that wheel," thought Alyosha as he raised his eyes above the garden.

He caught sight of a white church with a bell-fry crowned by a slender steeple. Then, behind the church and the steeple, he saw something incomprehensible—something alive with light, something huge, like many, many fields receding on all sides to the very heaven. He immediately realized that these were not fields, but water, and even more quickly realized that this water was the Volga.

"The Volga!" he shouted. "Mother, the Volga!"

No one answered him; they were all too busy carrying in suitcases, and he began to wonder if he were not mistaken. The Volga should have resembled the Neva, only much larger. But what Alyosha was looking at in no way resembled the Neva. There was no end to it, and there where the land apparently began, everything was as flat and endless as the water. To be sure, it was a different colour, a kind of violet grey, but this colour was also lively and scintillating, like water. He could even make out trees there, and perhaps a few houses, but they too seemed to rise straight out of the river. Furthermore, Alyosha had often heard that there were many large steamers on the Volga, but however he searched, he could find nothing but water, water, water, without a single steamer on it. To be sure, quite near by he saw two dark boats floating above the roofs of the houses. But boats could float not only on the Volga.

Just when Alyosha had decided to find out whether this could really be the Volga, and was congratulating himself that no one had heard him shout, "The Volga!", he caught sight of a dark wedge slipping out from behind the church, and this wedge began to grow on the water, as though it were sliding off the church like the lid of a pencil box. Then the wedge turned into a square,

and on this square appeared another square, and they both continued to emerge from behind the church, and the lower square carried the upper one on top of it, and then a third square appeared on top of the second one, just as the second had appeared on the first, and then they all began to stretch out in long lines, and suddenly they flashed dazzlingly white in the sun, and Alyosha could clearly make out little windows in each line, and more and more windows began to slip out from behind the church, and Alyosha realized that this was a steamer. Yes, a steamer was passing not far from the riverbank! More and more evidence that this was a steamer began to appear: a lifeboat on the upper deck, the captain's bridge, the black smokestack, another lifeboat, the foam under the paddle wheel beaten up like the white of an egg, the bright waves fanning away, and still another lifeboat up on deck. Then the upper line of windows broke off, following which the second line broke off; finally the stern deck appeared with a mast from which a lifeboat swung at an angle, a flag pluming above it like a fox's tail. Yes, there before the breathless Alyosha, who was clinging to the window sill and straining up on his toes, floated the entire huge three-decked steamer, from bow to stern. And then, as though to make sure that there should be no further doubt about it,

the steamer angrily belched forth a column of milky-white steam, while a second later a gruff, hoarse whistle came striking against the window-pane.

"A steamer on the Volga!" cried Alyosha, beside himself with delight.

"Hoorah!" shouted Arseni Romanovich, dropping a suitcase on the last step of the stairway. As though by general agreement everyone rushed to the window and stood shoulder to shoulder looking out at the river.

"A steamer sure enough, bless my soul!" sighed Alyosha's father after a moment's silence. "Maybe it's a good thing we landed in Saratov after all, eh, Asya?"

"Of course, Sasha," answered Alyosha's mother with a silent, happy laugh.

"A very, very good thing," confirmed Arseni Romanovich as he gave Alyosha a little poke in the ribs. "Right, Alyosha?"

"Are there steamers even bigger than that?" Alyosha asked him.

"No indeed. Steamers are never any bigger than that!" said Arseni Romanovich decisively.

"Shall we ride on a steamer, daddy?"

"Hm ... maybe even in a hydroplane," replied his father with a frown as he turned away from the window.

The newcomers hurried back to the task of settling themselves in their new quarters. Dorogomilov announced that he had to go to work, but asked Pastukhov to make himself completely at home. He told Alyosha that he could play in the garden, that there was a carpenter's bench in the shed, and that he could enter any room he liked.

It was a strange apartment, one of those built for tenants, rather than for an owner who planned to live in it himself. But it was built in the good old way, with thick walls, and floor boards that would not bend under the weight of a dray horse, and doorsills unworn despite the tramping of three generations. A huge Russian stove stood in the middle of the front room, now occupied by the unexpected guests. Evidently this room had been planned as a combination kitchen and dining room, as was once the style. Partitions extended from either side of the stove, forming a small room with a sleeping bunk in it.

On this bunk Alyosha immediately sat and lay and stood, measuring how close he came to the ceiling; then, after quickly depositing his neglected toys on the bunk, he slipped back to the window in the corridor. He had been warned that he was not to go into the garden without Olga Adamovna, so after another look at the Volga, he set out to explore the apartment.

The window overlooking the Volga was the only one in the corridor, the other end of which was dark, and Alyosha could feel all kinds of boxes and furniture stacked against the wall. His eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness as he moved ahead with cautious little steps, and he made out some baskets heaped on top of each other, a pile of firewood, a wardrobe with a sheet of cardboard substituting for one of the panels in the door, an iron washstand, a large cage (apparently for a parrot), some armchairs with a folding bed on top, a stack of books covered with a piece of carpet, and a lamp above the books suspended from heaven only knew what. Alyosha timidly touched all these things, especially the cage and the washstand with a faucet that allowed itself to be twisted in any direction. His fingers became velvety; he sniffed them and found that they smelled like the sidewalks in summer.

He continued to the very end of the corridor, where he discovered two doors facing each other. The one on the left was open a tiny crack, and he could see that the sun was shining into the room. He glanced in. There was a kitchen stove in one corner. The window opened onto the same garden, only from a different angle, and revealed a view of the neighbours' scanty yard and the

towering church steeple which looked entirely different than it had looked from the corridor.

On the stove lay a lifesaver painted red and white, with torn loops of rope about the outer edge. Alyosha lifted it and found it to be very heavy: it was amazing how such a contrivance could not only float, but even support a person who was drowning. Alyosha remembered the sign, "Throw to the Drowning" painted on the lifesaver which hung on the bridge near the Summer Garden in Petrograd, where some cork balls also hung. He pulled the lifesaver off the stove onto the floor, and rolled it like a hoop, shouting to himself, "Throw to the Drowning!" as he cast about for some place where he might throw it.

Out in the hall he spied a stairway. It led down to the yard. The wooden entranceway below was striped with sunlight, and the door into the yard was ajar. If The Drowning was down there, then the lifesaver would have to be thrown down the stairs, in which case Alyosha would have to follow it and would be able to take just a little peek into the yard. Alyosha rolled the lifesaver to the stairway and was just about to take a deep breath for the command: "Throw to . . ." when Olga Adamovna came flying down the corridor with her curls bouncing and her eyes screwed up as protection against the horror of what she saw. She rushed

at Alyosha and removed the lifesaver with a grimace of disgust, after which she brushed his jacket, brushed his knees, brushed the palms of his hands, and when her own speechlessness was overcome by these brushings, asked imperiously:

"Where did you find that thing?"

"I found that thing on the stove," answered Alyosha.

With a grunt she restored the lifesaver to the stove.

"Dear me, Alyosha, I can't go walking with you now. I have to help your mother unpack the bags. But promise me, darling, that you won't go down a single step of these stairs!" Olga Adamovna rolled up her eyes as though she were appealing to some higher power.

"I won't go down a single step of these stairs," repeated Alyosha as he was wont to repeat his French lesson, and he also rolled a pair of mischievous eyes to the ceiling.

When Olga Adamovna had gone he glanced disappointedly into the room, where he had found nothing of interest but this lifesaver. He could not understand why the stove should be there. Perhaps the room was a summer kitchen.

He remembered the other door and went over to it. It was closed, but easily opened at his touch. There were as many things in this room as out in

the hall, only here they were lighted by two windows looking out onto the street. Apparently Arseni Romanovich lived in this room, where everything—the bed covered by a torn quilt, the desk resembling a combined carpenter's and tinker's bench, the stacks and piles and bundles and heaps of yellowed books, the old plush armchair with only one arm, and the damaged china closet containing some brightly-coloured dishes, all bespoke of an energetic life filled with an ebullience of interests.

Through the half-open door Alyosha poked first his nose, then his head, then his shoulder and one foot; finally he slipped his whole body in. But he took only one step.

For suddenly the silence was broken by the shrieks of two angry voices. Something fell and rolled and bumped, the cries turned into grunts and roars, then into clearly defined threats and imprecations. With a sudden crash a door to the left (which Alyosha had not yet noticed) burst open and two boys in a tight clench lunged into the room. Alyosha started back, and in doing so slammed the door shut behind him. There he was, alone with these two desperate fighters. They battered each other mercilessly, snatching at a torn book and pushing it into each other's faces, at the same time using their free hands to administer

blows on the back, head, side, shoulder—on any spot that happened to fall beneath their whirling fists. More and more pages from the battered book went flying into the air and settling on the floor like pigeons; faster and faster hammered the fists, like pistons, and Alyosha could not make out which of the boys was winning, which losing. It seemed to him that the terrible fighters would kill each other. They shifted positions, pressed each other back, sprang up, stooped down, and in this twisting and lunging and the snowfall of torn paper the only thing he could see was that one of the boys was redheaded and the other towheaded, like Alyosha himself, and that they were bigger than he was. The palms of Alyosha's hands grew cold and clammy. He realized that he ought to run away, but he was powerless to stir or to tear his eyes away from the awful wonder of this sight. He could not understand the fierce scraps of words wrenched from the boys' throats like the pages from the book, but as he stood holding his breath in fear, he too began unconsciously to grunt and mutter.

"Take this!" came to Alyosha through the confusion of blows, knocks, bangs, crashes, snorting and hissing. "Here's another! ... Like it? ... Take this! ... Take it yourself, yourself, yourself! ... Here, and here! ... Bang! ... Swot! ... Umph! Umph!"

Soon nothing remained of the book but the empty cover. The redhead snatched it away, jumped back, and hurled it at the towhead as he shouted: "Here's your Conan Doyle for you! Take it and eat it!"

But the towhead again threw himself at the redhead with the cry:

"I'll show you your Conan Doyle all right!"

Four fists pounded above heads lowered like the heads of young bulls, but this did not go on for long. After a couple of misses, they separated, wheezing and panting as they wiped their faces on their sleeves, unbuckled their belts, pulled up their pants, straightened out their shirts, rebuckled their belts, once more wiped their red, scratched faces, this time with their hands rather than their sleeves, and looked for signs of blood. But the faces had suffered less than the book.

"Well, you got it this time!" said the redhead.

"What *you* got this time is nothing to what you'll get next time," retorted the towhead.

They silently continued adjusting their toilettes and observing the field of battle. The towhead was the first to pick up several of the scattered pages and study them attentively.

"Won't you get it from Arseni Romanych though!"

"It's you who'll get it. What'd you have to go rip up the book for?"

"Why'd you snatch it off the shelf?"

"Why'd you hide it? Lied that you couldn't find it, when you had it hid away there all the time!"

"I was the one to find it, so I had the right to read it first. I'd have given it to you afterwards anyway."

"Why'd you have to go and lie about it? I could tell by your nose you was lying when you started lickspittling it to Arseni Romanych."

"I'm no lickspittle. You're the lickspittle."

"Oh sure, it's me all right! Should've heard how pretty you said, 'Arseni Romanych, will you allow us to read Conan Doyle if we find the book?' And all the while you had it hid behind some geography or other!"

"What'd you have to go sniffing around the geography for? Snooper!"

"I know where to snoop. Got a sharp nose, I have."

"Sharp nose! Won't be so sharp once I smash it for you!"

"Try it!" retorted the redhead, and began rolling up his sleeves.

But the crisis passed. After a strained moment he also bent down and picked up one of the pages.

"What page you got, Pashka?" asked the tow-head presently.

"Seventy-five. And you?"

"Eleven to sixteen."

"Let's sort them out on the bed and put them together."

"We can paste them. Grandad has some gummed paper."

They got down on their hands and knees, gathering the pages from under the bed, desk, and armchair, and handing them to each other. So far they had not seen Alyosha, for they had emerged from their fight with their backs to the door; in any case, they had been so absorbed in their quarrel that they would hardly have noticed him. But now that they had undertaken to collect the pages, they would surely discover him, since some of the pages had fallen at his very feet. He himself was eager to help pick them up; his fear had now passed and he was happy that such a desperate fight had ended without serious casualties. But first he had to announce himself. He decided to cough. Just at that moment the redhead straightened up to glance about the room, and his fearless brown gaze fell directly on Alyosha.

"What's that?" he said. "Who are you? Look, Vitya!"

The towhead had already walked over to Alyosha and was staring at him with eyes that were also terrifyingly fearless.

"Probably he's the fellow who's come from Petrograd to live with Arseni Romanych," he observed.

"You from Petrograd?" asked Pashka.

"Yes," answered Alyosha, choking on his saliva.

"Whatever Arseni Romanych could see in you!" said Pashka wonderingly.

"Did you see what happened?" asked Vitya.

"Yes. Excuse me," said Alyosha, lowering his eyes.

"That's all right. We aren't scared," said Pashka. "What's your name?"

"Alyosha."

"How old are you?"

"Seven-going-on-eight," replied Alyosha, as though it were all one word.

"We're from Saratov, Vitya and me, and we're eighteen, but you're from Petrograd and only seven."

"Oh, aren't you smart though, adding both your ages together!" said Alyosha boldly.

"Don't like it? Afraid, because we're older! Well, snooty, how about a little sparring—me with just my left hand, want to?" said Pashka challengingly.

"No," confessed Alyosha in a faint voice. "Olga Adamovna doesn't allow me to fight."

"Who's she?"

"My governess."

"Don't you listen to that she-governor of yours," said Pashka. "They won't let you do anything if you listen to them."

"Well, come on, help pick up these pages," ordered Vitya.

Alyosha immediately dropped down on his knees and began crawling about with the ecstasy born of release from fear. He jumped up when he had gathered two or three pages, handed them to the boys, again dropped on his knees, and again jumped up until his efforts led him to the room from which the boys had emerged. There he caught sight of long, high shelves filled with books, not in any particular order, but at least standing side by side and not very dusty.

"A library," he said, sitting back on his heels.

"How do you know?" asked Pashka jealously.

"My father also has a library."

"Nobody has a library as good as Arseni Romanych's," said Vitya.

"Soon we're going to make it a city library, for all the boys and girls," said Pashka.

"I can see Arseni Romanych letting you!" objected Vitya.

"If we want, we'll just take it all away from him," boasted Pashka. "According to the new law you can take away whatever you want."

"You're crazy!" said Vitya.

"You're the one that's crazy! Want everything just for yourself! Tightwad!"

They both frowned over the pages they were placing in the cover. In a minute the book was completely collected and Pashka said to Vitya:

"Your grandpa said you had to come home."

"Home! He sent me to the market himself to sell some dyes."

"What kind?"

"For Easter eggs. Said I could sell them or exchange them for eggs."

Vitya pulled the packages out of his pocket and all three of the boys began studying the bright pictures of rabbits, roosters, and red, blue, and purple eggs, which were larger than the rabbits and roosters.

"Who wants your dyes now?" said Pashka contemptuously. "Easter's over."

"The peasants'll take anything," answered Vitya. "They want everything. Once I sold some rubber bands—you know, the little round ones. The peasants bought them all up."

"Did you celebrate Easter at home?" asked Pashka.

"Uhuh. Did you?"

"How could we, silly? Don't you know my mother's dying?" replied Pashka turning away.

Vitya poked the assembled book under Alyosha's nose and shook it threateningly as he said:

"Not a word of this to Arseni Romanych, hear?"

Alyosha shook his head and crossed his hands behind his back in an impressive pose.

The door opened as the boys were walking over to it. Olga Adamovna stood there in her remarkable plush coat and fantastic hat. She held her hand to her heart and her chin was trembling strangely.

"Alyosha, how did you ever get in here with those boys! Who are you, children? Do you live here?"

"We come to see Arseni Romanych," answered Vitya, studying Olga Adamovna as though he were considering hiring her.

"Is she the one?" Pashka asked Alyosha coldly.

"We're already acquainted!" Alyosha hastened to assure Olga Adamovna.

"You should have waited until your elders introduced you," observed the latter. "What's wrong with your knees, Alyosha? Come along, I shall brush you and wash you, and then we must go for a walk. Goodbye, children."

She took Alyosha by the hand.

Pashka shook his head as they went out and winked at Vitya.

"Well, let's go to the market!" he said.

Olga Adamovna met Anastasia Germanovna in the corridor and touched her on the elbow as she whispered:

"Some horrid boys frequent this house! Goodness gracious, we certainly have landed in a terrible place!"

"Don't get upset, my dear Olga Adamovna," said Anastasia Germanovna lightly. "Not a terrible place, but a very amusing one! There is not a whole piece of furniture in the house! A sort of collection of invalids. A houseful of funny invalids!"

She laughed in her soft, noiseless manner, and on a sudden impulse pressed Alyosha's head to her breast.

* 5 *

Merkuri Avdeyevich Meshkov rose early in the morning. He never had been given to lounging about, and during the last year or so he had become afflicted with insomnia, so that he began his day at dawn. That was his hour of solitude, as if he were in a monastery. From the adjacent room

came the quiet breathing of his daughter. Every once in a while his grandson Victor would bump his knee or elbow against the wall in his sleep. Even the dreams of this little fighting cock were bellicose! Was it his father he took after—Victor Semyonovich? To this very day the latter walked around with his dander up. You would have thought his wings and tail had been sufficiently clipped: not a feather left of his nest! High time he was toning down! But not he! He kept counting on something or other and saying:

"Just wait, Papa, just you wait awhile!"

"What's there to wait for?" Merkuri Avdeyevich would ask. "Been waiting an evil year and a half, and we're just that much nearer to the grave. Take my Valeria Ivanovna, now—she couldn't wait—went to her rest."

"It's all the same whether luck's with you or against you," objected Victor Semyonovich. "Every day brings you nearer to the grave, and that's the truth. All depends on mother nature. But other things depend on us. Any man worthy the name's been given brains so he can make his life what he wants it to be."

"Just see what a fine job your brains have made of it!" gloated Merkuri Avdeyevich.

"Not my brains," objected Victor Semyonovich again. "*Their* brains, and *their* brains are the

simple kind. *They* think *they* can take things by sheer force, but you've got to have an education in the twentieth century, otherwise force does nothing but harm. Take me, for instance, Papa. A fine person to have working for *them* I am! Make you laugh! But the people at the Executive Committee sent for me. Why? Because there's not another automobile mechanic like me in the city! Any idiot can set an automobile going, but just try to keep one in repair if you haven't a special education! *They* can manage to break them without us, but when it's a matter of repairs *they* come running. It's *their* lack of education that'll finish *them* in the long run, you just wait, Papa!"

"As for me, I've decided there's nothing to wait for," answered Merkuri Avdeyevich. "And why should you keep calling me papa? It'll soon be three years since I took your son to raise and Lisa won't let me even mention your name. That's how things stand. And you still keep calling me papa!"

"What you so fussy about—you're my son's grandfather, aren't you, and my wife's father?" insisted Victor Semyonovich. "Soon everything'll be like it was before, and the law'll give me back my wife and son. So that makes you my papa of the past and my papa of the future. No escaping it till your dying day."

"Oh no," objected Merkuri Avdeyevich. "Lisa will never return to you—no sense fooling yourself. Lisa's had a taste of freedom and likes it."

"What's freedom?" replied Victor Semyonovich unperturbed. "Who cares for freedom as long as the bread's free? And the bread'll come my way sooner than Lisa's. Freedom! I'd be only too glad to make a break for freedom myself, but my belly holds me back. So I go rolling along in the Mercedes belonging to the God-given authorities."

"God-given!" snorted Merkuri Avdeyevich. "Aren't you ashamed to say it?"

"Why should I be?"—marvelled Victor Semyonovich.—"If *they* have no shame, why should I? How else can I learn to speak *their* tongue?"

"Why should you want to help *them*?" cried Merkuri Avdeyevich in a burst of anger; then, in a pedantic tone, as though enlightening the erring, he repeated the prophecy of Daniel: "but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand."

Meshkov was roused from his musings by another thump of his grandson's elbow, and he thought to himself: No, it's not after his mother he takes, not after his mother. Lisa has the soul of the unforgettable Valeria Ivanovna: a soul in awe of life. Only she's become very stubborn.

Where does she get that from? Surely not from me!...

• He felt that he had overcome his sin of stubbornness, especially since the moment when he had decided to abandon the world, accepting everything worldly as predestined and the fulfilment of prophecy, as well as proof of the wisdom of God's punishment. He was convinced that he submitted to events of his own free will. But he saw very well that it was impossible not to submit: if you did not hand over your possessions they would be confiscated; if you hid them they would be found; if you did not bow you would have your hat knocked off, and maybe your head in the bargain. But if you convinced yourself that your humility was self-imposed for the sake of the salvation of your soul, then you seemed to become reconciled, and at least during rare moments, such as these in the early morning, you enjoyed a state of worshipful blessedness. The hour was too early for good people to be about, too late for bad ones.

The branches of the willow in his front yard swung in graceful resignation as the breeze gently touched their silvery leaves, as delicately tinted as opals. The tree had been planted by Merkuri Avdeyevich himself, and he and Valeria Ivanovna had carefully nurtured it. Just look how it had grown! And the amount of time that had passed could

neither be reckoned nor comprehended. To tell the truth, all time had passed for Merkuri Avdeyevich, leaving nothing but an empty shell. Whatever he looked at reminded him of Valeria Ivanovna. It seemed that she had not occupied a very important place in the daily bustle of Meshkov's former life, yet now that she was gone it was as though she had taken everything with her. But she had not died. Oh no. Merkuri Avdeyevich referred to her death as an assumption, a withdrawal from this world. He said that her soul had been borne away on a breath as gentle as the morning breeze. Her death had offered no inconvenience even to her husband, for as she had lived without being a burden to anyone, so had she died: she had simply gone to sleep in the evening and never awakened. In the morning Merkuri Avdeyevich had gone over to her bed, bent over her, and dropped, stricken, upon her already cold and rigid face. That had been a year before, and since then he had searched his memory for anything with which he might reproach himself as her husband, but except for the last few months of her life, he could find nothing. During those last few months he had tortured her with his mad, insistent craving to strip their home of any sign of beauty, comfort, or coziness. How did this express itself? Here was a picture hanging on a nail. Merkuri Avdeyevich would pace the floor,

back and forth, back and forth, with characteristic little jerks up onto his toes, glancing viciously up at the offending picture until he came to a halt in front of it, took it off the wall, ripped it out of the frame, then hung it back as crooked as possible with its face to the wall, while he threw the frame up in the attic. "But why?" expostulated Valeria Ivanovna. "How has the picture offended you—after all these years of giving us pleasure?..." "Don't let it upset you, mother. The worse off we are, the better *they* like it," answered Merkuri Avdeyevich. "But *they* can't see it!" she exclaimed. "When *they* come *they'll* see it all right!" he replied. Or else he would unscrew the nickel knobs off the bedstead and toss them into a box of old nails. Or he would turn the sideboard with its face to the wall so that it was almost impossible to use it and order his wife not to dust the cobwebs. And always he would give the same answer: "*They* want things to be ugly—let *them* have *their* ugliness to *their* heart's content!" He let the plants dry up, threw away the flowerpots, demanded that Valeria Ivanovna put oilcloth on the table instead of the linen cloth, and waited impatiently for the person who would surely come to their house and surely be impressed by the penury of their living, and would testify to the fact that his quarters were as miserable as the quarters of the visitor himself—in other

words, just what was demanded by the times. But nobody came. His mania drove Valeria Ivanovna to tears. But now, as he calmly thought back over all this, he felt that he had been right, and therefore, suffered no sense of remorse as he remembered his dead wife. For no sooner had Valeria Ivanovna died than they actually did come to inspect his house and yard, and soon thereafter the entire property was turned over to the city, leaving two rooms to him and Lisa and his grandson. Now he lived in the house that had once belonged to him not even in the role of a tenant, but simply as the occupant of the two rooms which had been allotted to him, just as an old workman and three medical students lived in other rooms which had been allotted to them. He lived in an alien house, in a house belonging to *them* (among whom he included the old workman and the students, for, while they did not actually own the house, they lived in it with the ease and security and self-assurance of owners). Valeria Ivanovna should see all this—then *she* would know whether he had been right or not! Even the bed on which she had died now belonged to another: the old workman slept on it. It was a good thing that Merkuri Avdeyevich had at least managed to screw off the nickel knobs, otherwise the workman would indeed be living like a lord!...

In that early, silver-opalescent hour, the whole house which had once belonged to Merkuri Avdeyevich was sleeping—tenant Lisa with her tenant son, the tenant workman, and the tenant students. Only tenant Merkuri Avdeyevich was up and about. After going over in his mind all that had taken place and bidding his heart and mind to be submissive, Merkuri Avdeyevich took a book and a notebook off the shelf, sat down at the table, dipped his pen in the ink, and murmured with a sigh:

“Behold I come quickly!”

His library was ruined: he had sold and given away all his Athos religious books, including even the book about Hermit Theophanes; only recently he had given his greatest treasures, “The Lives of the Saints” and the “Prayer Book” to his friend the Bishop, now spending his last days in a hermitage beyond the monastery. However, he had preserved a few volumes which he hid away after purposely tearing and soiling them and removing the covers, so as to make them look utterly worthless.

The book which he was now poring over was new to him, and made particularly tempting by the fact that it came from the pen of a non-Russian author, a retired colonel named Van Beiningen, wholly unknown and therefore highly intriguing—probably Dutch or Flemish in origin. In spite of the fact that the author was a foreigner, Merkuri

Avdeyevich accepted his authority not only because the book had been passed by the censor even in the fatal year of 1905 (the censor knew what he was doing!) but also because of its unquestionable affinity with the spirit of the Greek Catholic Church, whose teachings filled Meshkov's soul with peace and his mind with spiritual nourishment. Into the notebook he copied a chronology beginning with the creation of man—Adam and Eve—in 4152 B.C., checking the retired colonel's dates with texts from the Bible. He was tremendously fascinated by historical names such as Tiglathpileser, or Esarhaddon, king of Assyria and Babylonia. Some of his notes were very brief, such as "753. Founding of Rome." Others were surprisingly detailed, such as "713. In the course of three years Sennacherib captured all the fortified towns in Judea. Hezekiah offered three hundred silver talents" (Merkuri Avdeyevich first made the error of writing "rubles," instead of talents, but caught himself in time and smiled at the thought that you would not get very far on three hundred rubles these days, what with rye flour costing three hundred rubles!—so he scratched out the rubles with his penknife and continued copying) "and thirty gold talents for a promise of peace. But since Sennacherib was planning an invasion of Egypt and was afraid to leave an unconquered enemy in the rear, he surrounded

Jerusalem. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah prayed to God for protection, and one night 185,000 warriors perished in the Assyrian camp and Sennacherib retreated to Nineveh where he was killed by his two elder sons, after which his younger son Esarhaddon ascended the throne." The closer Mercuri Avdeyevich approached modern times, the more extensive became his notes. The Assyrians and Babylonians were substituted by Persians, Goths, unheard of Marcomani and Alemanni, followed by the Huns who came from the grassy steppelands, then the tribe of Langobards, whose name resounded like martial drums and timpani, and whose kings Alboin and Kleph instituted the Seventh Order, in confirmation of holy prophecy and the computations of the retired colonel. History knew no pause, and matters became ever more menacing in their development: "Alboin and Kleph, kings of the Langobards, were killed by Rosamund, wife of Alboin and daughter of the conquered and assassinated king of the Gepidae" (Gepidae—just look what different varieties there were!). "This was Rosamund's revenge against Alboin who, during a feast, had forced her to drink from the skull of her murdered father. This period of impotence continued until the year 585." (Impotence, impotence, thought Mercuri Avdeyevich, carefully making note of the dates.) But see, Pope Gregory I had already

formed three new kingdoms: the Bavarian, Avar, and Slavonic, or Czech, so that within the bounds of Rome there were once more ten states (there they were, the ten kingdoms!). And so it went on: Mohammed conquered the Koreish and forced them to accept the new faith which he himself had invented, though he claimed to have received it from the Archangel Gabriel. Then Omar conquered Jerusalem. Then Pope Vitalius issued a bull forbidding all but the clergy to read the Bible. Then came Huss and Luther with their reformation, then Ignatius Loyola with his Jesuits, then Pope Gregory XIII with his new calendar (so that's where it came from, the new calendar!). And on it went: The Thirty Years' War, the Slovenian War, the Hussite War. What didn't history include! But the thing about this book that most astounded Merkuri Avdeyevich was the fact that for every murdered Alboin, for every emperor Phocas torn to pieces by the infuriated mob, to say nothing of the downfall of every empire and the coronation of every pope—for each of these events it was as easy as rolling off a log for the retired colonel to find the corresponding prophecy in the book of Kings of Ezra or Isaiah if the events took place in ancient history, or in the Acts or Revelations if they took place in later times. Thus step by step Merkuri Avdeyevich reached the year of 1773, the heading to which he

wrote entirely in capitals except for the last word, which was too dreadful to write at all: "The Influence Of Voltairian Literature. Decline Of Religion And Beginning Of Open atheism." Not even the victory of Suvorov over the Turks nor the wiping out of the Jesuit Order by Pope Clement XIV on demand of the great powers could lessen the horror of this fact. No, they could not lessen the horror, for immediately followed the date 1793. And again in capital letters: "First French Revolution. First Punishment Inflicted By God For atheism." The Napoleonic wars turned out to be the second punishment inflicted by God for the sin of atheism, while the third was the dreadful year of 1848, along with the flight from Rome of Pope Pius IX and his restoration to the throne with the aid of Austrian soldiers. And so little by little retired Colonel Van Beiningen led Merkuri Avdeyevich in the footsteps of the prophets up to the year of 1875, when a congress of Social-Democrats was held in the city of Gotha. At this point Merkuri Avdeyevich printed in large, funereal letters the words: "Marx, Lassalle, and Tolstoy—representatives of that teaching." Such was the lamentable ending of the historical path trod by humanity, and nothing was left for the colonel to do but, by resorting to divination, raise the curtain on the future. Here he had little to offer: the colonel

scheduled the ruin of the Papacy and its supporters for 1922; he prophesied the building of a Christian temple by the Zionists in 1925. As to what would come later, the only thing he left for Meshkov to copy obediently into his notebook was a statement concerning the year 1933: "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."

Just what these days were and why there should be exactly 1335 of them was not quite clear, but naturally one could not be expected to comprehend everything. How, in general, had all things developed throughout the long history of human hopes and strivings? From Adam and Eve to Esarhaddon, from Esarhaddon to Rosamund—and there before you knew it was Leo Tolstoy and your own house turned over to the city and third-grade rye flour selling for three hundred rubles! Just to think! Probably not even a mind like the retired colonel's was capable of fully comprehending so complicated a chain of circumstances. And indeed, why should it? The fascination lay in the mystery, alluring as an eternal spring rising from fathomless depths. Consolation was to be found in faith rather than knowledge. Knowledge only confirmed faith, and when faith lacked this confirmation it was made all the sweeter thereby, like all mystery. "Blessed is he that waiteth. . . ."

Merkuri Avdeyevich closed the book and his notebook. The morning had begun for everyone. He could hear the tobacco-poisoned workman coughing and the students bustling about and throwing their boots at each other. Lisa's kerosene stove began to smell, Vitya crashed down the stairs on his way to the bakery for the morning loaf, the waterman's pail clanked against the cistern cart he was driving down the street. The newborn day summoned his thoughts from the depths of time and a contemplation of the ways of God to a sober consideration of the problems of daily life.

Merkuri Avdeyevich opened the drawer of his desk and began to figure which of the trifles consigned to liquidation should be sent to the market today. He gazed at a collection of thumbtacks, tablets of dry ink, a couple of sewing machine screwdrivers, pliers and forceps, two or three spools of thread, a Christmas tree star, and some packages of Easter egg dyes. After a moment's consideration his choice fell on these packages: to be sure the season was over, but there was no stopping Vitya—he could get rid of even the most outlandish trash, such as the backs off used calendars. He would find a customer for the egg dyes too!

Merkuri Avdeyevich went in for breakfast, said good morning, and stood looking attentively at his

daughter. She was exceedingly pale, and what he had formerly called her slenderness now seemed emaciation. He nonchalantly tossed the packages in front of Vitya.

"Well, my little merchant, think you can handle this commercial operation today?"

"Again?" said Lisa. "I asked you, father..."

"Don't you worry, mother, it's a cinch to get rid of them, honest to goodness," put in Vitya.

"The market is not the place to learn anything worth knowing."

"And it's not a place you can get along without these days," frowned Merkuri Avdeyevich. "It's not me who thought up this new system. It's not me who skyrocketed prices. Nothing in the house to eat but some millet if I'm not mistaken. But perhaps you have some money? Well, then..."

"I am saying that Vitya should not be sent to the market."

"Maybe you think I'm the one to go? Oh, of course, it's not much of a disgrace for a former merchant to stand in a crowd and trade an empty pocket for an emptier one. But the trouble lies in the fact that in addition to being a former merchant, I am at present a Soviet employee. Like it or not, I am now the Comrade Manager in charge of a store. Do you want me to be accused of speculation?"

"I want Victor to keep away from the market. It will surely end in trouble."

"I have long since insisted that everything will end in trouble. But not for everybody," said Meshkov, then added, as though to remind himself that he must be submissive: "'Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of his prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.'"

After a brief pause Lisa said quietly, without raising her eyes:

"In a word, this is the last time I shall let Vitya go."

"We shall see," said Meshkov.

"Yes, we shall see," repeated Lisa calmly, as though agreeing with him.

Unable to bear further reproaches, he rose, took his glass of tea and went into his own room.

She watched him go. So bent was his back that it seemed a pillow had been pushed between his shoulder blades. His hair was white. His whole figure had become narrow and shrunken, and there was something painful in the way he jerked up on his toes.

"Goodness, how quickly he has become an old man," thought Lisa, and now, as so often during the past year, she was overwhelmed by a wave of pity for her father. But she remained where she was sitting.

All that day Lisa was uneasy. She felt sure that something was about to happen, and this was not one of those premonitions that rise unaccountably and as unaccountably disappear. It was a persistent heaviness that bore down on her shoulders and made her entire body ache. She did not go to work. Gradually she became convinced that this something would happen to her son. He had left the house early in the morning and had not yet returned.

On his way home to dinner Merkuri Avdeyevich met Pavlik Parabukin, from whom he learned that Vitya was not at home. Meshkov asked Pavlik to send his grandson home for dinner if he met him. The old man glanced guiltily at his daughter. She briefly remarked that Vitya was probably at Arseni Romanovich's house reading, and as usual had forgotten the time. The fact that she kept herself in hand and did not show her uneasiness made Merkuri Avdeyevich feel more guilty than ever, and he remained sullenly silent.

Meshkov had his usual nap, and was just about to leave the house when Pavlik came running in to announce, as he shot frightened golden glances first at Lisa, then at Meshkov, that Vitya had been arrested.

"Arrested? Who arrested him?"

"They raided the market and grabbed up everybody who was selling things."

"What do you mean grabbed them up? What are you saying?" asked Lisa, clutching the back of the chair so tightly that her nails went white.

"Herded everybody at the market into some yard and now they're sorting them out—some go to the militia station, others to other places."

"And Vitya? Where's Vitya?"

"There with all the others."

"At the militia station?"

"No, I told you they were not at the militia station—they're in the yard!"

"Were you with him?"

"Yes, but I got away and he got caught."

Lisa unlocked her fingers with an effort and ran to the bed, where she picked up her shawl, threw it down again, opened the wardrobe, and began searching for something among her dresses, muttering the while: "Wait a minute, wait a minute, Pavlik, you must take me to him, just a minute..." Merkuri Avdeyevich took her by the arm, and led her over to a chair.

"You're not going anywhere," he said, sitting her down. "I shall bring Vitya back."

She got up again excitedly, but he pushed her back.

"Sit down!" he cried. "I'm the one to answer for him! I'll go myself!"

He strode away so quickly that Pavlik almost had to run to keep up with him. It was a long walk, but every stone was familiar to Merkuri Avdeyevich: not so very long ago he had made a daily trip to his own shop in the Upper Bazaar. His movements were filled with suppressed determination, as though he were out for vengeance, and he tapped the pavement with his puny little stick as he had once swung his fine cane with its handsome knob, now hidden away from hostile eyes.

"There," said Pavlik, pointing to a crowd of people between the stone stalls of the market. "There where the militiamen are—that's where they took them."

Merkuri Avdeyevich slackened his pace and ceased swinging his stick. Outside of a building whose doors hung on rusty hinges (formerly soap and kerosene had been sold here) milled a motley crowd of people apparently waiting for something, and watching two militiamen guarding the gates of what had once been the market inn. One of the militiamen was a beardless youth who seemed highly pleased with his responsibilities. The other was short and pompous and boasted a dashing mous-

tache that curled upward like a cat's. Both of them gazed fixedly at Merkuri Avdeyevich.

"I have come about my grandson, comrades. My grandson got caught in your raid by mistake," said Meshkov, approaching cautiously and raising his cap.

"People don't get caught by mistake," answered the youth.

"What do you mean? He didn't intend to get caught, but he got caught. It was a mistake. Unexpected for his mother too, and for me, an old man."

"Of age?"

"What?"

"Your grandson of age?"

"Dear me no, comrades! Why he's smaller than this little chap here," said Meshkov, pointing to Pavlik.

"Why should a youngster with the milk still wet on his lips be selling things?"

Pavlik felt of his lips and turned away indignantly.

"He—selling things?" said Merkuri Avdeyevich in horror, and was about to cross himself, but stopped in time. "Sheer mischief, nothing else. They're mere children, my grandson and this little playmate of his. They're always needing a fish-hook or some kind of a cage for a bird. So they come hanging about the market. Where else can

they find such things? They're just children—what can you demand of them?"

"What can you demand!" mocked the short militiaman with a shake of his head and a jerk of his whiskers.

"How you going to demand it?" said Meshkov confidentially, casting a respectful glance at the red insignia on the militiaman's uniform. "You yourself know times aren't what they used to be. Used to be you'd just give them a good beating, but you can't lift a finger against them these days: hands off the children!"

"Why give him a beating?" interrupted Pavlik with unexpected insolence. "What's he to blame for? Fishhooks! Bird cages! Phoooh!"

He squinted at Meshkov with reproving condescension and concluded witheringly, half turning to the militiamen:

"You don't know what life's like!"

"Have to stick your nose in it, don't you?" barked Meshkov, wrenching Pavlik by the sleeve. "What you going to do with youngsters like these?"

"Put them in the reform school," answered the militiaman with a grin at Pavlik.

"And who might you be, citizen?" asked the youthful militiaman.

"A Soviet employee. Here I am having to neglect my job to rescue my grandson."

"The children are being sorted out through the other gate," said the bewhiskered one. "Come along, I'll lead you through the yard."

The youthful one opened the gate. Pavlik tried to slip through along with Merkuri Avdeyevich, but they caught him and turned him back, and he walked off with an injured air, studying the block of abandoned market buildings as he went.

The yard was crowded with people. Taken together they presented a remarkable conglomeration. One had only to look at them to realize that some great cosmic cataclysm had taken place—mountains had shifted, striding forward like live creatures; summits had crashed, cliffs had been precipitated into the abyss, and behold—one of the countless flying fragments had torn loose and landed in the God-forsaken backwash of the Upper Bazaar. Swindlers and pickpockets, and dethroned minor aristocrats were to be found among the shabby collection of people forced by circumstances to resort to trade, and now disnally awaiting their fate. There was an endless diversity of faces: some raised woeful eyes to heaven like the Eternal Countenance praying that the cup might pass; others glanced about them squeamishly, as though their neighbours were insects which they would like to brush away; still others pierced each and everyone with gimlet eyes as much as to say: we don't know

about the rest of you, but you can be sure we'll bore our way to the ends of the earth if need be; some stood with their chins high to indicate that though their crowns had been removed they still felt them upon their brows; a few looked over their neighbours' shoulders with furtive, doglike eyes as though uncertain whether their master would beat them or only kick them aside; there were those who pulled viciously at their cigarettes and seemed to be chanting to themselves, "We may be under the horses' hoofs today, but we'll see who's riding high tomorrow"; some displayed that complete independence possessed by those who despise themselves no less than everyone else, and while falling lower than others, maintain an appearance of superiority. In a word, here was a crowd caught in a trap, eager to find a way out, ready to defend the treasures stuffed in pockets and caps and consisting of secondhand underwear, grandmother's buttons and buckles, stolen Red Army rations, lace curtains, boots and home-brew, church calendars and books interpreting dreams.

"Thank the Lord I'm not like them," breathed Merkuri Avdeyevich with a shudder, and in the same breath reproved himself with the words of the penitent publican: "Forgive my sins, oh Lord!"

In one corner of the yard huddled a group of adolescents and a handful of smaller boys with the

look of having been kept in after school. Merkuri Avdeyevich was about to search for Vitya, but the guard led him into a stone building where a quiet man in a black leather cap sat at a large desk weighing the gravity of the offences committed against law and order.

"Who are you?" he asked a tousled, sharp-eyed Mordvinian standing before him.

"A charcoal pedlar—'Charcoal-charcoal!' Sold charcoal from a cart. Now the mare's gone, cart's gone, charcoal-charcoal's gone, everything's gone. Come to sell my last shoe sole."

"What do you mean by speculating in tsarist money?"

"What for I want tsarist money?"

"That's what I'm asking you, what for? Why did you set the price of the soles in tsarist money?"

"Do I know what kind money people have in their pockets? I say, what kind money you pay me for my soles? Tsarist money—ten rubles; Kerensky money—hundred rubles; Soviet money—thousand rubles."

"That's speculation, once you make Soviet money cheapest of all."

"What do you mean cheapest?!" cried the Mordvinian indignantly. "Tsarist money bad money, good-for-nothing money—I take just a little—ten rubles. Kerensky money little little better—I

take more—hundred rubles. Soviet money best—no money better than Soviet money—I take most of all—thousand rubles.”

The quiet man laughed, winked slyly at the Mordvinian, and said cheerfully:

“Guess you’re not the fool you’d like me to think you are, eh? So you like Soviet money best of all, eh? Want a lot of it?”

He had them take the Mordvinian to one side and turned to Meshkov. Merkuri Avdeyevich respectfully told his story.

“What’s the boy’s name?”

“Shubnikov.”

“Shubnikov?” repeated the man and hesitated. “Belong to that family whose signs are still hanging over the shops at the market?”

“A distant relative,” answered Merkuri Avdeyevich apologetically. “Grandnephew of the late Daria Antonovna.”

“That’s what I’m saying—belongs to those Shubnikovs? Son of the one who owned the stores?”

“But he was abandoned by his father. I’ve been acting as father to the boy for I don’t know how many years,” said Meshkov.

“Any identification with you?”

Merkuri Avdeyevich took out a carefully folded paper. The bewhiskered militiaman leaned toward

the table to join the quiet man in deciphering the faded typing which in some places had been gone over in ink.

"Meshkov," he read aloud, twitching his whiskers menacingly. "Was it you used to keep the hardware store here at the market?"

"Humph," thought Merkuri Avdeyevich. "Apparently your memory's as long as your whiskers."

"Such a long time ago that was!" he sighed.

"Wish it was now, don't you?" said the militiaman.

"Oh no! Glad to have done with it, that trading. No point in it," answered Meshkov.

The quiet man searched through the lists that had been hastily written in pencil until he found the name of Shubnikov and placed a check beside it.

"Here's the name," he said. "The boy was found to have one package of egg dyes with him."

He was silent for a minute, during which he traced and retraced the check he had made, then said ponderously:

"You're poisoning the minds of the people—taking advantage of their backwardness. Time to abandon old habits. You may take your grandson now. Next time you won't get off so easily. We'll keep an eye on your family with its commercial tendencies from now on."

"Thank you very much," said Meshkov, humbly removing his cap. "I am very grateful to you, comrade," he added hastily as he replaced his cap and bowed.

Once out in the yard the militiaman went over to the group of boys and called out the name of Shubnikov, but Vitya had already spied his grandfather and came running over to him. The child was pale and had circles under his eyes, but his happiness made him livelier than ever.

They were let out onto the street. No sooner had they passed through the gate than Pavlik rushed up to Vitya, linked his arm in his, and went marching off with him, whispering busily in his ear. The relieved Merkuri Avdeyevich followed at their heels. His jerky step had become lighter, he stroked his beard and swung his stick with a swagger. Not only had the danger passed; it was he who had taken the blow upon himself like a lightning rod, and if the boy had been rescued, he had every right to call himself his rescuer.

On hearing the voice of her son, Lisa rushed to meet him, almost sliding down the stairs as she had been wont to slide down the bannister in an excess of joy when still a girl. She hugged Vitya and kept saying impulsively:

"I'll never let you go anywhere again, never, never, not for anything in the world...."

"Thank goodness, thank goodness," chimed in the grandfather.

Vitya freed himself from his mother's arms, which kept stretching toward him, and breathlessly related what had happened—how he had not managed to escape, how he had been led away under guard, how a list had been drawn up of all the people in the yard, and how everyone had hidden his wares, trying to get rid of food products, which it was forbidden to sell. Suddenly he broke off, and with a little toss of his head went over to the table, where he proudly emptied his pocket of a piece of pork fat with bits of newspaper sticking to it. Pavlik gazed in awe at the hero.

"Ah, you little monkey you! How did you manage to get hold of that?" said his grandfather.

"Who cares for the fat?" said Lisa, getting up and going over to the door, where she covered her face with her hands.

"I got it out there in the yard," continued Vitya enthusiastically. "There was a lady there who was scared to death they'd lock her up. She had half a bag of pork fat she was exchanging for anything she could lay her hands on, so I asked her if she wanted some Easter egg dyes. She said it didn't matter, they'd take the fat away from her anyway, and handed me this hunk. Much as a pound, isn't -

it, grandad? I gave her all the dyes—left myself only one package. When they began making out the list the militiaman asked me what I was selling. I said I wasn't selling anything—only had this one package of egg dyes. He took it and looked at it and didn't say a word."

"Well, it's a monkey you are, sure enough," said his grandfather approvingly.

He disappeared into his own room and a minute later returned triumphantly with a bright tin box of fruit drops.

"Here," he said, overcome by his own generosity. "I was keeping it for your birthday, but you can have it now. You've earned it."

He did not simply hand over the present, he ceremoniously bestowed it upon his grandson, then took the pork fat, and began carefully removing the newspaper stuck to it. Vitya glanced at his mother.

"No, no," said Lisa, immediately reading his thoughts and lifting her thin hands. "No, no, I don't want even to see that fat!"

"Why not?" asked Merkuri Avdeyevich in an offended tone. "We'll eat it together. I won't cheat you out of your share," he said as he took the fat into his own room.

"Grandad," said Vitya, stopping him, "please give me some of those gummed papers you have—

you know, the kind to mend tears. I need them awful..."

As he spoke he pulled up his shirt, unbuckled his pants and brought out the battered book.

"...have to paste some of the pages together a little."

"A fine scholar you are! You little monkey! How do you know what's in your grandad's drawer, eh?" said Merkuri Avdeyevich in the same generous mood.

He was enjoying a sort of spiritual elevation: to be sure, not all of his grandson's qualities were to be praised (for example, he did not sufficiently fear his elders, and this might lead in the future to his losing his fear of God—a fear which was the foundation stone of the universe). But it was resourcefulness rather than timidity that this life demanded of a person, and in this respect Vitya gave promise of great things. He had courage and initiative, and before you knew it he would be making his mark in the world, in spite of all handicaps. It is doubtful that any event was capable of changing the tried criterion according to which Merkuri Avdeyevich estimated an individual's worth—namely, his ability to make his mark in the world. To be sure, according to prophecy, "the time was at hand," which meant that the end of the world could be expected any day, and then

all that was human, with its system and lack of system, would be shot into a cocked hat. But what if that "any day" should drag out? What, for example, if it should last a whole generation? Or even two? What then? The earth, after all, was the earth. To be sure, wandering sheep were creating lawlessness on this sinful planet. Lawlessness was lawlessness, but there was no evading the fundamental law of this world: a man had to make his mark. And in this respect, Vitya's resourcefulness would stand him in good stead. A fine youngster, there was no getting away from it—a smart little chap, even if he didn't take too kindly to education.

For the rest of the day Merkuri Avdeyevich enjoyed a mood of quiet satisfaction. It seemed to him that he had managed to escape some impending peril and had even given someone the slip. But once the day had had a bad start, it apparently had to have a bad ending.

When he returned home at dusk, Meshkov found Vitya alone. He was sitting on the window sill, his bare feet propped up against one side of the frame, his back against the other, while his eyes were glued to a book on his knees. On a flower stand stood a glass jar containing sprays of poplar, whose delicate little green leaves brought the sweetness of spring into the room.

"Where's mother?" asked Merkuri Avdeyevich.

"Went out for a walk. That man came—what's his name?—the one who works where she does. Mother laughed and said she was sick and tired of staying home all the time and wanted to go for a walk."

"Hm. And that whisk broom sticking in the jar—a present, eh?"

Apparently it was.

"Doesn't she realize that this fellow probably came just to check up on why she wasn't at work?"

Vitya was unable to answer, but it seemed his mother didn't realize it.

"So now she's gone out for a walk," went on Merkuri Avdeyevich undaunted, "without stopping to think that somebody may see her. In the old times they would say she was playing truant. Nothing so awful about that then. But what do they say now? Sabotage! And once it's sabotage, the next thing will be an investigation: who's her husband? Who's her father? What'll happen then?"

Vitya was unable to answer this either, but it seemed clear that they actually might ask why Lisa had not gone to work when she was able to go out for a walk, and they might also ask who her closest relatives were—not that Meshkov, by any chance, Merkuri Avdeyevich, who was having an

eye kept on him because he sent his grandson to sell things at the market? How would you get out of a situation like that?

And to this worry was added another: that night Meshkov was obliged to serve as watchman on his block. All the inhabitants took turns on volunteer duty as a defence measure, and he too was an inhabitant—inhabitant of a communal apartment, nothing more. He always awaited this night in fear and trepidation—perhaps it would be his last—perhaps they would kill him. He hid his fear, but it froze his blood and made him keep wanting to breathe deeply, a very unpleasant sensation.

Formerly Valeria Ivanovna had equipped him for this ordeal. She dressed him in an old coat and a mangy caracul hat, found him a pair of old rubbers and a thick club, kissed him and made the sign of the cross as, with a prayer, he disappeared into the night. After her mother's death Lisa took upon herself the responsibility of seeing her father off. And now this was the first time that he had had to set out on such a perilous task without the comfort of a send off.

He waited for Lisa until the last moment, then ordered Vitya to go to bed so as not to waste kerosene, armed himself with a club, and went to get his whistle from the chairman of the House Com-

mittee of the Poor. At committee headquarters he made a few remarks about there not being much food and that the worst was still to come, took his farewell and plunged into the night as though he were jumping through a hole in the ice.

Everything was quiet, and black as pitch. Not even the sidewalks could be seen from the middle of the road. A menacing darkness lurked in the front yards, with their lilacs and acacias. The earth was still exuding the coldness of spring. Merkuri Avdeyevich weighed the club in his hand and swung it with the heavy end down, figuring out the most effective way to strike if he were fallen upon. He took the whistle out of his pocket and gave a blow to see that it had not become clogged up. But if anyone actually fell upon him, wouldn't it be better to throw the club away, take off his hat and coat and everything else—"Here, take everything, and God help you, only let my soul rest in peace!"

For Meshkov, the most unpleasant thing about the night watch was this club. As he thumped it noiselessly in the velvety dust he felt more like a robber trying his luck on the highway than a night watchman. No, it was not this club which had guarded the Meshkovs' former wealth; it was not this whistle which had frightened thieves and burglars from the Meshkovs' windows. It was not his

club that Merkuri Avdeyevich was carrying, nor his whistle that he was blowing, nor his law and order he was protecting.

He recalled the night watchmen of former days who on Easter and Christmas had dropped in to pay their respects; he had always tipped them a ruble. They had been poor and simple creatures. He remembered one old man from whose chest came rattling tunes when he breathed—very amusing. The old man boasted that his was a rare and incurable illness, given him for life, like a medal. He would hide his tip in the lining of his hat, laughing to expose a yawning hole of a mouth, black as his hat and without a single tooth in it.

And now here was Merkuri Avdeyevich himself a night watchman. He could hardly sink lower. And nobody was tipping him a ruble. Why should they? There was some sense in encouraging the old night watchmen: they knew whom they were protecting. But whom was Merkuri Avdeyevich protecting? *They* pushed a club into his hands—look sharp, watch out, protect *their* order for *them*, citizen Meshkov; blow on *their* whistle; stand guard for the brigands!

He kept turning the same thoughts over and over in his mind as he rounded the block and came back to his own house. He stopped and riveted

his eyes on it, recalling in the darkness the familiar carvings of the cornice, the sloping iron roof, the chimneys. . . . It was falling to pieces already. So quickly! Only two years! And what changes had taken place in people in that time!

Merkuri Avdeyevich ran a cold hand over his face: bristling brows like fine wire, sunken temples, a neglected beard with the Adam's apple bobbing beneath it. A man wore out as quickly as a house. And then everything all over again: nobody's house. *Their* house. Common property. Anybody's. The former house of Merkuri Avdeyevich. A house in which every board was bathed in his sweat. This nail in the casing—he went without food to buy it. Another nail—he went without drink to buy it. Went without sleep. Declined riding in a carriage. Deprived himself of buns with his tea. Denied his daughter a coin for sunflower seeds. Forbade his wife to make jam. They were building a house. Thus day after day, stone by stone. Now it was *their* house, a city house, common property, nobody's. A bitter coldness rose from the earth. Not a soul in sight. Pitch darkness.

Suddenly Merkuri Avdeyevich heard voices—first a man's, then a woman's. Quiet. Silence. Then the barely perceptible shadow of two figures so close together that they merged in one. Nearer, nearer. He could hear their steps. The woman

spoke, and Meshkov recognized his daughter's voice. He was amazed by the tenderness of the tone. He could not make out the words, but the alluring cadences lingered in his ears even when Lisa had ceased speaking.

Then the man spoke. Ah, it was the fellow who worked with her in the notary's office, and had formerly been employed in the Public Prosecutor's Office. It was he who had brought her that whisk broom in lieu of flowers. What a sugary tenor he had! Merkuri Avdeyevich began to shiver; it was cold standing there on the damp ground. Suddenly he caught his breath: that fellow from the notary's office—Oznobishin was his name, Oznobishin—had called Lisa "dear"! So things had gone as far as all that! His daughter Lisa who had left her lawful husband and taken her son with her, was now, in defiance of God and man, having her fling, returning at midnight to her father's home arm in arm with her lover!

So that is how you get rewarded in your old age for all your labours, Merkuri! Go wandering like a clown along the streets at night with your whistle, guarding your shame, your humiliation, seeing that no one interrupts your daughter Lisa kissing her lover at the gate! For it's kissing they are—once, and again, and again—count the times, father, if you have the patience....

Or perhaps Merkuri Avdeyevich is just imagining it in the darkness? The night is black and fearsome.

But why try to fool himself? It is all true. Lisa has said farewell to her escort, the latch on the gate clicks, and the notarial swain Oznobishin is marching off down the middle of the street.

Merkuri Avdeyevich stole softly after him. His steps were noiseless as he felt his way along the ruts blanketed with dust. His hands trembled. Once more he began to figure which end of the club he should hold. With a shudder he considered whether he should strike at the man's head or feet.

For a second he was so overwhelmed with fright that he stopped. Oznobishin immediately disappeared in the darkness. If Meshkov should now hurl the club at him it would be difficult to find it later. And the night was even more fearsome without the club.

Merkuri Avdeyevich squeezed his eyes closed. A flush swept over him. He slowly crossed himself and kept standing there, afraid to open his eyes. Was he really capable of killing a man? A man who was perhaps beloved by his daughter? It made no difference who he was. Out on the street. At night. Like a thief. God protect him!

With an effort he opened his eyes. Out of the darkness came a swaying patch of light casting

yellow circles which narrowed or expanded as they fell on the road, the fences or houses. It disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared, leaving the darkness the denser. Dull, indistinct voices could be heard. Merkuri Avdeyevich turned back in order to hide in the yard of his own house, but just as he reached the fence he was caught and blinded by the light of the lantern moving down on him.

Several men who were engaged in conversation approached.

"Evening, watchman!" they said to him.

Meshkov recognized the workers' picket—rifles were swung over their shoulders, cartridge belts girdled their waists, but they were not in uniform.

"Good evening," said Meshkov humbly.

"That's not the way to answer," came a young voice.

"Perhaps you'll teach me the proper way, brother?" queried Meshkov.

"I serve the revolution, comrades!—that's the way to answer!"

"Did you see who it was passed here?" asked the first voice.

"I didn't see anyone."

"You mean to say you didn't see this man?"

The light of the lantern left the face of Meshkov and swept upwards, falling on the mottled red

and yellow features of Oznobishin. Lisa's swain stood motionless, with tears welling in his resigned blue eyes.

"No, I didn't," said Meshkov in a scarcely audible whisper.

"Well, you better keep your eyes open. No napping on duty. This citizen's night permit has expired."

They all turned and walked off in a group, the light of the lantern streaming up the road in front of them and the barrels of their rifles awaying with their stride.

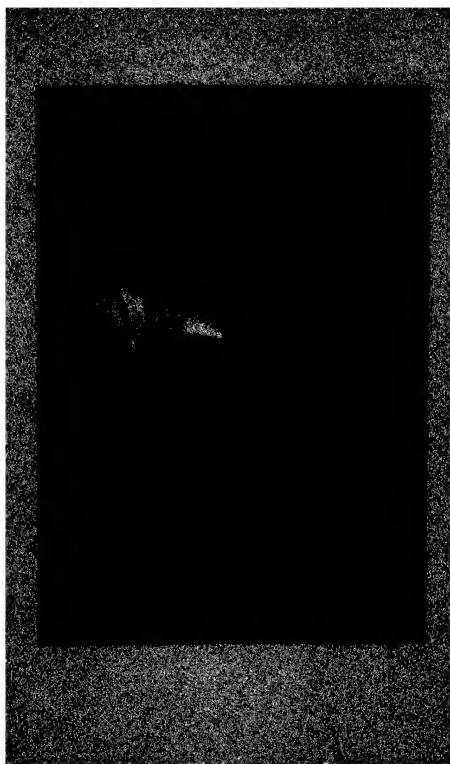
"Goodbye, old man—keep your eyes sharp!" called back the young voice.

"I serve the revolution, comrades!" answered Merkuri Avdeyevich, and felt his heart galloping as though it had just been released. Thank goodness the danger was past!

Once more he was engulfed in silent darkness. He was conscious of the sting of tears on his eyelids. They were tears of humiliation, caustic tears. He wiped them away with his fist and made his way toward his house.

He had just made out the light of the lamp in Lisa's window when he heard the latch on the gate click loudly. Vitya ran out into the street, looked about him and cried:

"Grandad!"



"Here I am. What are you shouting about? What's the matter?"

"Come quick, grandad! Something's wrong with mother!"

"What do you mean, something's wrong?"

"Hurry, hurry! She's calling for you!"

He pulled Merkuri Avdeyevich after him, clutching his fingers while they stumbled, almost running, through the yard. Meshkov also clutched the little fingers of his grandson, and in that clasp of the large and the small hand there was more fear than Merkuri Avdeyevich had just experienced out in the street, than he had experienced throughout all that miserable day.

Lisa lay on the bed fully dressed, with her head thrown back. A towel covered with dark spots and trickling blood trailed down from the bed onto the floor. Her pale eyes were enormous, and the sight of them caused Merkuri Avdeyevich's legs to give way beneath him. He sank uncertainly at his daughter's feet just as he was—in his hat, holding his club—and gazed at her in silence.

One of the medical students from the next room stood at the table vigorously stirring something in a glass. Tousled strands of fair hair hung like spaghetti over his frowning brows and swung in rhythm to his movements. Apparently he considered the silence to be a question addressed to him, and

said in the cheerfully hypnotic tone inherited from the old school of medicine:

"The phenomenon which we now observe..."

But he was unable to carry through, and ended up hurriedly:

"Don't worry, it's nothing serious. We'll stop it now, in just a second."

"Lisa, honey, what is it?" said Merkuri Avdeyevich, cautiously touching the hand of his daughter, as though the slightest contact might cause her pain.

She beckoned him with her eyes. He came closer, and knelt by her head. She whispered, interrupting her words with frightened pauses:

"Have Vitya ... run for Anatoli Mikhailovich.... He lives on the corner..."

"For the doctor? On what corner?" he asked, drawing a too hasty conclusion.

"Oznébishin.... Have Vitya... bring him."

Merkuri Avdeyevich wanted to object, but his voice failed him.

"On the corner... opposite Arseni Romanych..."

"But Lisa honey—it's night!" he made himself say, driving from his mind the memory of that red and yellow face with the resigned eyes. "Vitya's just a child. Someone might harm him. You can't do that."

"Vitya... say... that he must come back with you... now..."

"I'm not afraid, grandad," said Vitya, also in a whisper.

"But you don't even know the address. You'll never find it in this darkness. And what do you want with that Oznobishin? It's the doctor you want—the doctor, Lisa honey!"

"Vitya . . ." she whispered again.

"But Vitya has no night permit!" pleaded Merkuri Avdeyevich. "And maybe that Oznobishin hasn't either! Maybe he isn't even home! After all, it's night!"

Suddenly Lisa coughed and lifted her sharp chin still higher and became so motionless that it was as though the cup were filled to overflowing and she were afraid that the slightest movement might make it spill over. A dark spot appeared in the corner of her mouth and began to crawl slowly down to her neck.

"Mother, I'll find him!" cried Vitya unexpectedly and rushed out of the room.

"It's nothing," said the student nervously, tossing back his spaghetti and pressing the glass to Lisa's lips with trembling hands. "We'll stop it now, in just a minute."

Merkuri Avdeyevich sank forward on the bed.

"You won't stop anything," he gasped, shaking his head. "Nothing can be stopped now . . . nothing!"

Ragozin slept with his window open. Before he had quite waked up he could hear the banging of pails and the buzz of women's gossip as the housewives gathered at the hydrant, and the oral chronicle of local events began its early circulation.

He threw his hands over his head, grabbed the iron bars of his bed, stretched himself, and without opening his eyes, recalled what he had to do: he had been appointed to the city commission for investigating the cases of those who had been arrested, and a buggy was to be sent to take him to the jail. For many years he had been entrusted with all sorts of responsibilities, and was used to having to go places and tackle new problems. Before the revolution he had had to find subtle, round-about means of transporting weapons or documents or the Party printing press. After the overthrow of the government, responsibilities inordinately increased; the world that had been hidden in a mole hole was hurled to the surface in one great explosion, and life rolled past not only before the eyes of everybody, but above everybody, above their heads, above their hats, above their roofs, like spring thunder. Everything became vitally important; it was necessary to be everywhere at once,

and you no longer had to work behind the scenes, but right out in the footlights, where everyone could see you, so that wherever you put in your appearance—in a depot, a barracks, a hospital, a factory—people would know that it was one of their leaders who had come. He always felt comfortable and at home in new and unexpected places, like a trained hiker on reaching a camping spot. Sometimes he would jokingly say that he kept hiking among the people.

Ragozin got up and went to the window. The trees of the yard were wrapped in the pure blueness of the morning. Grey rifts of mist floated above the horizon. Already the sun had touched the soil, sending an aromatic warmth into the air. Sparrows chattered with bold self-oblivion as they ruffled their feathers and hopped about the puddles at the hydrant. A fierce crow sat on a flagpole, cocking an inky eye at the sparrows, and croaking disapprovingly.

Ragozin was captivated by the morning, and regretted that because of this assignment which could not be deferred, he would be unable to carry out his plan of looking up and spending a few hours with Kirill Izvekov, who had recently come to town. He had learned of his arrival only a little while before, when at the City Soviet they said Izvekov had been appointed Secretary and it was

necessary to find living quarters for him. Ragozin had not seen Kirill since the time when, nine years before, the underground printing shop had been discovered and both of them had been summoned to court. It would have meant imprisonment in a fortress for Ragozin, but he escaped, and for some five years wandered in disguise from one town to another along the lower reaches of the Volga, from Astrakhan to Nizhni Novgorod. Then he had turned up on the Oka, worked in a factory in Kolomna where he lived under an assumed name and won the reputation of a confirmed fisherman. Just before the revolution he had been sent to Petrograd. He knew very little about what had happened to Izvekov. According to the rumours, after Kirill had served a term of exile in the Olonets gubernia, he had been connected with the Bolshevik organization in the army. In 1917 his name appeared in the papers as a delegate from the front to the Congress of Soldiers' Deputies. He had made his public appearance at the very moment when Ragozin was sent to Kronstadt. When Ragozin returned to Petrograd Izvekov had already left. Again he had heard nothing of him for at least two years, neither in the place where he had served before being sent to his native city of Saratov, nor later in the city itself, where almost no one remembered Izvekov. Nor could they be expected to remember him, since

he had landed in jail while still a boy, and then been swallowed up in the swamps and forests of the northern lake regions. It occurred to Ragozin that Izvekov might be interested in visiting the jail where he had undergone his first ordeal. Perhaps that would be a good introduction to the renewal of their friendship: Izvekov would find his cell and Ragozin his—the one in which he had been confined in 1905—and both of them would indulge in reminiscences of this institution where their tempering for revolutionary struggle had begun. He was amused by the idea of meeting Izvekov after their nine years of separation and inviting him to jail.

With a laugh he pushed away from the window, and went over to the mirror. He passed his hands over his head and thought to himself as he studied his reflection that friendship was a capricious thing, and that perhaps Izvekov would not find this wrinkled, bald-headed fellow with the greying moustache to his taste. He felt the water in the pail. It had lost its chill during the night. He poured it out and left the room with the empty pail. His landlady in a gaudy kimono was putting something through the meat grinder. She greeted him without interrupting her work:

"Going to have a bath, Pyotr Petrovich?" she asked approvingly.

"A little swim in a pail," he answered, rattling the handle as he ran down the stairs.

The sparrows leaped up like splashes of water from a stone dropped into the puddle; the crow fluttered its wings in fright, but decided not to leave the pole, limiting its expression of protest to a few guttural "caws." The water rushed from the spout onto the resonant bottom of the pail; the sound soon dulled and rose higher and higher, running the gamut from a deep gurgle to a thin spatter until the water overflowed in cascades of liquid silver. In his impatience Pyotr Petrovich splashed a handful of water into his face, then onto his bald spot once, and again, and again. "Caw, caw!" cried the crow angrily. Pyotr Petrovich looked up at the bird: "Caught, you say? All right, but with my pants up!" he laughed and took another handful of water and splashed it at the frightened crow. Then he turned the faucet and without bothering to wipe his face, rushed upstairs with the overflowing pail.

Standing naked in a basin, he doused himself with the water, giving little gasps and grunts at the shock of it. He was so tall that although he had a slight stoop, his fists nearly knocked against the low ceiling of his modest little room when he rubbed his back with the long, homespun towel. As he was having his morning tea he heard a buggy draw up at the gate. Hastily swallowing a last

mouthful, he again ran down into the yard. There was something very young and unpretentious about him in his workingman's cap, which since the revolution had become a sort of symbol of democracy, his Russian shirt, and a short, unbuttoned suit coat whose colour might have been blue gone black, or black gone blue. He leaned against the cracked leather cushions of the rust-coloured, unpolished buggy as though it were quite normal that he should be riding in a vehicle that had once belonged to a lawyer or a merchant, and it seemed that at any moment he would jump out and go striding off down the street on his long, slightly bandy legs.

As he was bounced and jerked over the cobbles, he pondered the question as to how he should approach a task which even for him, experienced as he was, seemed unpleasant and complicated. The commission which had been appointed was large (seven members including himself, the chairman) and was made up of representatives from various institutions. Their job was to check up on all those who were being held under preliminary arrest, as well as to investigate the place of their confinement, the motives of their arrest, and the correctness of the measures taken by the local authorities. The commission had been granted the power of freeing any of those being held, of speeding up the hearing of a case, of transferring it from one

department to another or from a lower to a higher court; in a word, as had been candidly stated on appointing the commission, its authority was greater than that of the prosecutor's office, and was exceeded only by the court itself. Ragozin decided that the members of the commission should work separately, making the acquaintance of the prisoners, drawing their own conclusions in cases that presented no difficulties, while bringing complicated cases before the entire commission. His plan of procedure was quite complete by the time he drove up to the gates of the jail.

He knocked at the bars of a little window which was immediately opened. No sooner had he stated who he was than the locks and bolts began to click. He ran his eye over the gates: now they were painted a brick colour, whereas formerly they had been green, but he seemed to recognize the herringbone design of the side posts. As he entered he realized that his attention was divided: his efforts to concentrate on the task ahead of him were countered by the involuntary reminiscences his presence in this place evoked, and the harder he tried to collect his thoughts, the more insistently they wandered.

He saw the trampled dust of the empty yard. This prison soil had been just as bare and barren and disintegrating when he had been forced to step

upon it, paying with his blood and freedom for the vicious social system which he had determined to help overthrow and which now no longer existed. More than ten years of his life had been spent in avoiding these patches of barren earth which disfigure the faces of cities and towns like pockmarks. He was almost amazed that this familiar yard had not yet revived, become fertile and grass-grown. He ran his eyes over the whitewashed prison buildings with their monotonous rows of square windows. Behind which bars had he made his blood payment? Behind which bars had his little Ksana spent her last days? Behind which bars had his comrades sat and thought their bitter, vengeful, noble thoughts—comrades remembered and forgotten, comrades he had known for years, comrades he had never seen? The black windows squinted blindly at the light; the dead-white walls stared forth indifferently, as though pretending there was nothing behind them, no breath, no thoughts. But probably there were no other walls in the world behind which people thought so constantly, so intensely, with such passionate longing and so vainly, every hour, every minute, every second, and Ragozin asked himself why people should still be languishing behind such walls?

"People? Perhaps, but not *the* people," he suddenly snorted. Tearing his eyes away from the jail,

he again centred his thoughts on his immediate task, hurrying forward to meet a group of people coming toward him.

"Everybody here?" he asked as he shook hands. "One still missing? Shall we begin or wait for him?"

They went through a second yard to the office of the prison (it was now called a House of Detention), where they decided on the manner of procedure. Then Ragozin was left alone in a room with bars on windows and doors.

A pile of papers was brought to him. He divided them up and had them distributed to the other members of the commission, he himself setting to work on his share. The papers consisted of the personal documents, appeals, and testimony of the prisoners, as well as that of witnesses. Some of the cases seemed to be trifling, arising out of pettiness, meanness and conceit. Others puzzled him by the slippery evasiveness of the testimony. Still others were obviously serious and required important decisions. He classified the papers according to his first impression, intending first to take care of the simpler cases—get rid of the Philistines, as he said to himself—in order to clear the field for more serious matters. But after a second's consideration he suddenly decided to adopt just the opposite procedure—"Let the Philistines wait," he resolved, and began with the most complicated cases.

Across the top of one of the papers the words, "Official of the Public Prosecutor's Office under the tsar" had been written and underlined in red pencil. Ragozin sent for this prisoner and began to read the documents. There was very little to read: Anatoli Mikhailovich Oznobishin, thirty-five years old, university graduate, assistant to the Soviet notary, had been arrested by the workers' picket on the streets at night because of an expired permit; at the cross-examination it was discovered that before the revolution he had worked in the office of the Public Prosecutor and been candidate for a judgeship, but according to the investigator, he had fulfilled very important functions, even that of Prosecuting Attorney, and it was this fact which required verifying.

Some ten minutes later Oznobishin was brought in. He bowed and mildly rubbed his hands together, as though he were wiping them, and thanked Ragozin when the latter offered him a chair. He answered the usual questions briefly and exactly, without causing delay, yet without hurry, preserving his own dignity while at the same time displaying the proper respect for his interrogator.

"Just what was the cause of your arrest?" asked Ragozin when he had exhausted all the formal questions.

"The fact that my night permit had expired. But only by one day."

"Had you forgotten to have it renewed?"

"No, I had not forgotten, but with all the little concerns of daily life, I had no time. I thought that I would not need the permit that night, and would have it renewed the following day. That, of course, was a mistake for which I am responsible."

"But why, in general, do you need a night permit?"

"I am often detained at work—ours is a painstaking task. During the day we are busy with clients, so we have to spend our evenings making out documents. Several of our employees have such permits."

"Had you been detained at work on the evening in question?"

"No, not that evening."

"Where had you been?"

"That evening? On some personal business," replied Oznobishin hesitantly.

"Out for a walk?"

"Yes."

"A woman?"

"Yes," Oznobishin dropped his eyes.

Ragozin had observed people under the most varied circumstances. He was used to judging a

person not only by his words, but by those little glimpses of inner life which might be called the chemistry of emotion, when a person's feelings suddenly crystallize into a compound, or, on the other hand, break down into their component parts, any one of which may obscure another, making what is false seem more actual than what is true. But he could not detect the slightest pretense in Oznobishin's behaviour and was anxious to determine whether his sincerity was genuine, or whether it was dictated by a sense of prudence.

"Can you really think that you are being kept here just because of an expired permit?"

"Of course not," said Oznobishin with a shrug of his shoulders and a slight gesture of his hands which was a well-mannered indication that, in the first place, he could not accuse the authorities of anything so unjust, and in the second, that he was familiar with the laws concerning night permits.

"But you yourself have just said that you were arrested for an expired permit."

"That was what I said in reply to your question as to why I had been arrested. I was arrested for an expired permit. But just now you asked me if I thought I was being detained here because of an expired permit, and I repeat that of course I do not."

"In other words, you know for what you are being detained?"

"No, I do not. I can only assume that it is because my past history causes you to distrust me."

"Just what did you do in the past?"

"I served in the office of the Public Prosecutor."

"In what capacity?"

"I was candidate for a judgeship."

"Were you a candidate for long?"

"Yes—formerly I would probably have added, 'unfortunately,' " answered Oznobishin with an apologetic smile that suggested a certain embarrassment. "Now I add 'fortunately.' I was kept a candidate for nearly seven years, from the time I finished the university. I was unlucky so far as my career was concerned, to use an old-fashioned term."

"Why?"

"Well," replied Oznobishin with a lift of his brows. "I am in no sense a careerist, and I had no one to back me. I come from a simple family."

"But if you had had any backing?..."

"I doubt that it would have helped."

"Mighty poor backing if it couldn't have helped," commented Ragozin.

"True enough," agreed Oznobishin, adding lightly, "but in my case, no one would have undertaken to back me."

"Are you so unlucky?"

"Yes, just naturally unlucky."

"What do you mean—naturally?"

"Unlucky by nature." Again he lowered his eyes. "They didn't trust me in the Prosecutor's Office."

"Didn't trust you?"

"No. I didn't resemble the other officials, and this made them distrust me."

"They may not have trusted you, but they made you Public Prosecutor!" said Ragozin suddenly and decisively.

Not only Oznobishin's face, but his entire body expressed the question which he could not force his stiffened, protesting lips to form. With a great effort he conquered his emotions and said anxiously:

"Will you allow me to explain?"

"It's not explanations I need; I demand that you tell me all about your past without hiding a thing."

"I am not hiding anything," said Oznobishin, still struggling with the sense of injury expressed in his whole appearance. Finally he said with a modest, polite smile which was nevertheless filled with bitterness:

"Now I realize that you suspect me of hiding my true identity. That is wrong. I never was the

Prosecutor. Just before the revolution I was made Secretary of the Court Chamber, but this appointment was never confirmed. How could the myth arise that I was the Public Prosecutor? It seems to me that it can be explained only by the fact that exactly two days before the October Revolution, that is, during the time of the Provisional Government, the Chamber received an order from Petrograd appointing me Assistant Prosecutor. This appointment was dated the 23rd, and the overthrow of the government as you know took place on the 25th. None of the formalities attending the appointment were ever carried out."

"Why did you hide these facts at the cross-examination?"

"I hid nothing. They asked me who I was, so I made no attempt to tell them who I was not."

"But actually you were the Public Prosecutor, weren't you, if not under the tsar, then during the Kerensky regime?"

"No. I was never the Public Prosecutor. I cannot even say that I was ever the Assistant Prosecutor, for I never took over the responsibilities."

"But you were Secretary of the Chamber under the tsar?"

"I merely carried out the functions, but I was never confirmed in that position," said Oznobishin earnestly.

"Clever of you!" laughed Ragozin.

"What is clever about it? All that I have said can be easily verified by documents. The archives of the Chamber are intact. And I can name as many witnesses to the truth of my statements as you wish."

"What made Kerensky so fond of you that he made you Public Prosecutor?"

"Assistant Prosecutor," corrected Oznobishin. "And it wasn't Kerensky who did it; the appointment was simply made during the period of his government. Kerensky couldn't have known me, of course. And in those times appointments were made wholesale."

"What do you mean by that?"

"People were appointed wholesale, throughout all judicial districts, just as by a general order ensigns were appointed in the army."

"But what was the purpose of these appointments? To fill government institutions with people loyal to Kerensky, if I am not mistaken."

"As far as I understand it, the purpose was to substitute tsarist officials in the courts by younger and more liberal-minded men. Appointments were given to those who during the tsarist regime were not trusted for some reason or other and therefore

not promoted. It seems that I, along with many others, fell into this category. Seeing that I had been kept a candidate for a judgeship for so many years, they apparently concluded that I could not have rated very high with the guardians of tsarist law."

"You mean to say that in the eyes of that law you had no services to recommend you?"

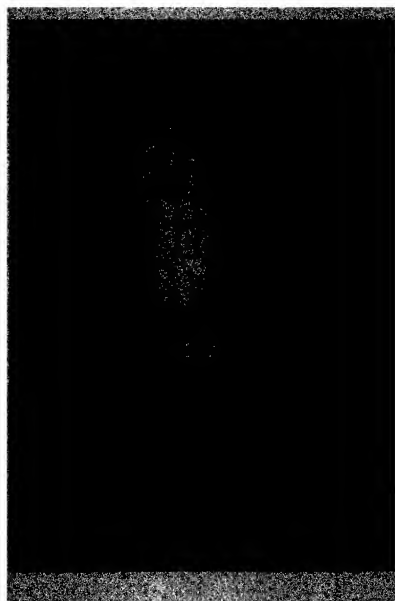
"Services? On the contrary," said Oznobishin with a shrug. "It would seem that before the revolution I won nothing but the disapproval of the authorities, a fact for which I was rewarded after the revolution by receiving an appointment which now, for some reason or other, is costing me so dear."

"So it turns out the revolution brought you honour, eh?" scoffed Ragozin. "Just see how you've twisted things!"

"I have twisted nothing. I simply wanted to state that I made no advancement in my profession before the revolution because I was not trusted by my superiors."

"Just what was the reason for this?" asked Ragozin with a shade of annoyance. "You keep saying they didn't trust you. Why shouldn't they have trusted you? What was the reason?"

"I can only guess," answered Oznobishin in a confidential tone, as though he were speaking to a close friend. "Most likely it was because I did not



approve of political arrests and persecution, and showed too little enthusiasm for such cases. To be sure, I was not entrusted with any serious work—simply the gathering and briefing of evidence. But to whatever extent it was within my power, I tried to ease the hard lot of those who were persecuted by tsarist law for their convictions—sometimes even revolutionaries.”

“So that’s how it was!” said Ragozin with a slight toss of his head. “Perhaps you can give me an example?”

“For example, the case of Ragozin, which caused quite a sensation in its time,” replied Oznobishin.

“What was the—case of Ragozin?” asked Ragozin after a brief pause.

“A matter of an illegal print shop run in a cellar by a revolutionary named Ragozin. Many people were involved and the affair dragged out a long time, but Ragozin was never caught. He ran away.”

“Who was he—that Ragozin?” asked Ragozin, studying Oznobishin intently. “Was he a Socialist-Revolutionary?”

“Ragozin? No, he was a Social-Democrat. A worker at the railway depot. Many intellectuals and young people were mixed up in the affair.”

“Did you take part in the prosecution?”

"The case was handled by the Chamber and I was entrusted with some of the documentation, so I became familiar with the circumstances. Naturally I could not exert much influence, but at least I had the satisfaction of helping a man named Pastukhov who was implicated. Perhaps you have heard of him—he is well known in the theatre world—a playwright."

"What had he to do with it? Also in the underground movement?"

"No, he was dragged into it because of his associations, but he, like many others, was threatened with exile because of the affair. Tsvetukhin, a local actor, was also involved. And I managed to help him too. Naturally my sympathizing with these 'unreliables,' as they were then called, could not have been to the taste of my chief, the Assistant Prosecutor. And my colleagues also looked askance at me. That was what I had in mind when I said that I was not trusted at the Prosecutor's Office."

"So it was a big affair, was it?" asked Ragozin, turning away from Oznobishin.

"The Ragozin case? Very far-reaching: proclamations, a secret organization, a print shop, many people accused. It was one of the most sensational cases in our district."

"Well, and that—what was his name, Ragozin?—nothing happened to him?"

"That I cannot say. At any rate, he was never caught, and so the law required that his particular case be dropped. Perhaps nothing happened to him. There were plenty of such escapes. The old regime was unable to cope with experienced revolutionaries."

"With experienced ones, of course..." Ragozin muttered to himself, then asked offhandedly, "Was he a family man?"

"Ragozin? So far as I can remember he was not. I know he had a wife, because while he managed to get away, she did not. She was arrested and died here in jail during the investigation."

"What did she die of?"

"Well, you know what jail was like. If I remember correctly, she died of childbirth."

Ragozin took up the papers. He bent his head over them almost without stirring, as though he were trying to decipher something there. Suddenly he tore himself away and said quickly:

"What about the baby? Did it survive?"

"I cannot say. It is possible, of course."

"I realize that it is possible, but I am asking you if you know?" asked Ragozin with some irritation.

"No, I do not know," answered Oznobishin warily, narrowing his small eyes which suddenly seemed to have grown calm.

"It is possible of course, quite possible," said Ragozin with his former self-possession, as though trying to show that he would not allow himself to be rude. "I asked you that question because it is well known that there are only too many such children—children born in jail."

"Unquestionably," assented Oznobishin hesitantly.

"And it is necessary to show some concern for their welfare."

"There's no denying that the greatest attention is being paid to children nowadays," said Oznobishin with a sigh.

"Nowadays," said Ragozin, once more in a harsh voice. "Nowadays—that's different, but did anybody ever give a thought to them formerly? Who cared about a child born in jail? What did they do with it? What did they do with it, I'm asking you?"

"Usually put it in a home," answered Oznobishin.

"In a home? What home?"

"There were homes for orphaned children."

"I know. But I'm asking about that, let's say ... that woman you just mentioned, the one who died ... supposing her baby remained alive ... what could they have done with it ... where could they have put it?"

"I don't know," replied Oznobishin, carefully feeling his way. "But an effort could be made to find out, if this particular case concerning Ragozin's wife interested you."

"Could it?"

"Certainly. Traces may be found among the material on the Ragozin case."

"Do you think that this material has been preserved?"

"I have already said that the archives of the Chamber are intact."

"And would you be able to find this material?" asked Ragozin in a burst of impatience.

"Probably—most likely," answered Oznobishin slowly, after a moment's thought. "But not in my present situation—that is, not while I am deprived of my freedom."

Suddenly they exchanged a long, silent look of mutual understanding. Ragozin's quick breathing came with a hiss through his moustache, while Oznobishin breathed loudly through his half-open mouth. They remained motionless several seconds. Then Ragozin noisily turned over the papers on his desk and pushed them aside, saying curtly:

"So you contend that you rendered service to certain people persecuted by the tsarist court? In the role of a liberal, eh? On liberal motives?"

"Out of sympathy," explained Oznobishin.

"That's clear. The only time we have no sympathizers is when we're not in power."

"But that was before you were in power," Oznobishin reminded him tactfully.

"But you are speaking of this sympathy of yours while we *are* in power and not under the tsar," objected Ragozin. "I shall ask you to write out the names of witnesses who can confirm your testimony concerning your former position. Are there any questions you would like to ask?"

"One. To whom should I submit a request for release?"

"That is unnecessary. The commission will investigate your case and make a decision. Now you may go."

Oznobishin rose and bowed with the same air of respect with which he had entered. He had already reached the door when Ragozin stopped him sullenly:

"Just a minute. So you think you might be helpful in looking up material on that interesting case you just told me about?"

"The Ragozin case?" asked Oznobishin, adding with a sort of fatherly affection, in the manner of a devoted advisor: "Yes, it is doubtful that you could find a better man for that purpose than me. I am acquainted with the archives of

the Chamber. But of course it will be necessary to search through the archives of the secret police and of this jail as well—clues may turn up most unexpectedly.”

“Perhaps in the orphanages too?” put in Ragozin.

“Orphanages?” repeated Oznobishin, not quite comprehending. “Ah, yes, of course,” he amended hastily. “In the former orphanages. About the child, you mean?”

“Yes. Now you may go,” said Ragozin impatiently. But his embarrassment and irritation impelled him to ask a question which surprised even himself:

“Do you know my name? Has anyone told you?”

“No. And what is your name, comrade?”

“You may go,” said Ragozin sharply, as though he were being disobeyed.

As soon as the steps of Oznobishin and his guard had died away down the corridor Ragozin jumped up and rushed from one corner of the room to another, once, twice, three times....

“Fool, fool, oh what a fool!” he almost screamed aloud, rushing over to the window and striking his fist against the sill. “He’ll think he is indispensable to me. Damn it all! This would have to happen to me today of all days!”

Once more he pounded the sill, then threw open the window and stood motionless with his fingers grasping the bars.

Again his eyes encountered the barren earth of the prison yard. Perhaps for the last time in her life his Ksana had dragged her weary feet over this insensate earth. Ksana! For an instant she had risen, living, before him when the lips of the stranger had pronounced that dear, unforgettable, long unspoken word—wife. He saw her hands, remembered how she had been wont to rest her sharp elbows on his rough knees and stretch her palms upward, as though expecting him to pour into them some treasure which she would fondly carry into the future. And now that future was here, but Ksana was gone, and for many years he had been alone with his thoughts. No, of course he was not alone—he had his comrades, many comrades, with whom he could share all his thoughts freely and earnestly. But with them he always had to search out apt, suitable words, while Ksana had understood the silent turn of his head, his half-closed eyes, his grunts, his cough, and, perhaps most important of all, the shy, whimsical humour with which he glanced at his wife when they were thinking about the coming baby they both wanted so badly. Eight years before Ragozin had learned that his wife had died in jail of childbirth and he had grown

used to this comfortless knowledge. On returning to his native city he had attempted to find out the details of her death, but all the people he met were new in Saratov and no one could tell him anything. For some reason death from childbirth had always seemed to him to exclude the possibility of a child's being born. At the present moment he had for the first time realized that Ksana might have left him a son—assuredly a son! He had thought that with her death everything had ended for all time. And now he suddenly realized that this had been an enormous mistake! That she had not entirely died, but had left him part of herself, part of their life together, and that part could not die—no, it could not possibly die! His son, the son which he and his wife had awaited as the resurrection of their first-born, who had died when Ragozin was in exile—the son of his incomparable Ksana was of course alive! This conviction suddenly filled Ragozin's whole being, becoming as real as the huge jail rooted in this barren earth. In this jail his son had been born, and in this jail was born Ragozin's conviction that his son was still alive and could not possibly be dead.

"I shall find him," he said resolutely, painfully relaxing his grip on the cold bars. As he turned away from the window his eyes fell on the papers calling him back to work.

He immediately recalled the entire cross-examination and decided that Oznobishin of course had not been Public Prosecutor. If he had, he would not have remained living in the same city; he was too clever and cautious for that.

Ragozin wrote: "Call witnesses to verify the testimony of citizen Oznobishin," and took up the next case. But he worked under unusual strain. However he tried to keep his mind off his son, he kept thinking of him all the time, wondering how he should begin the search, what clues he should follow, and who might help him. And then he imagined their life together, once the child was found.

By the end of the day Ragozin was so tired that he could hardly drag himself to his house, to which he went on foot for the sake of the airing. His landlady shook her head when she saw him and said:

"A comrade came to see you and was very sorry not to find you in."

"Who was he?"

"A young comrade. He came in a machine, and what a machine! The little boys came running from all over the street!"

"Didn't you ask his name?"

"He left you a note with his address and said to give you his best regards."

Ragozin climbed the stairs unhurriedly and picked up the note from his desk without any par-

ticular interest, but on seeing the signature he eagerly devoured the sharp pencil strokes ripping into the paper.

Hello Pyotr Petrovich, old friend!

Happened to drop in—what a pity you weren't at home! But there's no escaping me—I've got my eye on the whole of Saratov! Heard about the job they've given you—don't envy you—not a very cheerful task. Please come see me the first evening you're free. At present I'm living with mother—Soldiers' Settlement—take the trolley to the end of the line and ask where the school is. That's where we live. Can't wait to see you. What are you like?

Impatiently,

Kirill.

Ragozin tossed the note on the desk, folded his hands, raised his arms above his head and cracked his locked fingers.

"Humph, Kirill! Damn it all!" he laughed, then strode to the door and shouted to his landlady:

"How about putting up the samovar?... Not a bad idea.... And if there was a bit of vodka left from the last time ... that wouldn't be a bad idea either!"

Once more he laughed and murmured "Humph, damn it all!"

All Dibich's efforts to board a steamer to Khvalynsk were in vain. But the greater the difficulties he encountered, the more determined he was to reach his home, and he decided that if he was unable to board a passenger steamer, he would jump on a towboat or hire himself out as a bailer on a barge—it was all the same to him. He went the rounds of the piers, which were swarming with people like flies about honey cake. He went to all the offices and headquarters, stood in line all night for various permits and passes and resolutions, tried acting on all the well-meaning advice offered him, and, on the contrary, tried doing just the opposite, but nothing helped.

His efforts finally brought him to the Military Commissar of the city. On the day he first came, the commissar was not receiving. Dibich spent the entire next day standing in line for his bread ration. On the third he was told that the commissar had been receiving the day before and that he, Dibich, should manage to get places at the proper time. On the fourth the commissar was unexpectedly called away, and only on the fifth did Dibich manage to have his name written down on the waiting list. Like everywhere else, the commissar's office was besieged by a crowd of people who all

looked alike, but were actually all very different. Some of them were from units of the tsarist army long since disbanded, and had come to ask aid in their personal affairs; others were new recruits in the Red Army; still others had come to arrange for sick leaves, or to wangle a postponement of the date of their being called up, or to answer for some misdemeanour. They were men both old and young who had seen much of life since events had wrested them from their homes and families and peaceful labours. All of them were tired, many of them were bitter and ready for anything at all if only it meant a quick decision of their fate—home or army—anything but this endless sitting about on stairs and porches, in corridors and waiting rooms hung with faded posters and announcements.

Dibich's turn to be received came in the afternoon, when the commissar was already worn out with hearing demands for help and complaints that invalid pensions had not been paid. He had slumped over with his elbows on the desk, moist from the closeness of the room, dizzy from the cigarette smoke. He was listening to the pretentious report of a swanky young soldier wearing a new khaki uniform which immediately repulsed Dibich by reminding him of the fops who used to hang around staff headquarters while fighting was taking place at the front, as well as because everything about

the suit was extravagant: the knee-length coat decorated with patch pockets the size of letter boxes, the wide leather belt encircling his wasp waist, the riding pants billowing out like carriage wheels, the puttees carefully spiralling up his thin legs, like crullers on a stick.

"But a cultured person doesn't do things like that!" the young soldier ended with obvious contempt as he smoothed back his neatly parted hair with the edge of his hand.

"You think so?" asked the commissar, drumming with the black crescents of his nails on some papers—one-two, one-two, one-two-three, in rhythm to the jingle "Titmouse, titmouse, where's your home?"

"What's your business, comrade?" he asked Dibich. When the latter had explained, he said with an air of boredom: "That doesn't concern us. Have to apply to the War Prisoners Committee about that."

"I've been there twice."

"Well, and what?"

"The Committee sent me to the Evacuation Department; the Evacuation Department sent me to the Social Maintenance office; the Social Maintenance office sent me to the commandant, and the commandant sent me to you. When all is said and done..." began Dibich with rising anger.

"Sh-h-h," interrupted the young soldier, sticking his left thumb into his belt and making pacifying movements with his fingers.

"From whom do you receive rations?" asked the commissar.

"From the military, as one recently discharged from the hospital."

"That's a mistake. You should receive them from the War Prisoners Committee."

"It's all the same to me. The only thing I want is to reach my native town."

"It may be all the same to you, but it's not to us."

"Until you arrange this journey for me, a former prisoner, a sick man, a demobilized officer, a lunatic if you like, it's all the same to me," insisted Dibich. "I consider myself the responsibility of military authorities and I'm not budging out of this place until you ship me off to Khvalynsk."

"Come, come!" interrupted the swanky soldier again. "Who do you think you're talking to? The Comrade Commissar says you're the responsibility of civil organizations now, of Soviet organizations and not the military, is that clear?"

"Write him a note to the City Soviet and let them take care of him," said the commissar, dismissing the matter and getting back to his "Titmouse."

The young soldier lifted one eyebrow to indicate the door, snapped his heels together and went out first. His shoes resembled irons with the flat end forward, and shone like small suns. When he reached his desk in the outer room the telephone rang. He took off the receiver, listened for a moment, and then said offhandedly:

"Zubinsky at the phone fulfilling orders.... I repeat, Zubinsky at the phone fulfilling orders. If you don't know what 'fulfilling orders' means you're either a civilian or a blockhead!"

He hung up and took Dibich's documents.

"You a regular officer?" he asked after he had glanced at them.

At that moment there was another ring of the phone.

"You again?" asked Zubinsky with a lift of his padded shoulders. "Well, now, nothing to get angry about, old man; I said, Zubinsky at the phone fulfilling orders.... Yes, of course, in the old days I'd have simply said 'Adjutant Zubinsky,' but we're living in the new days, not the old ones.... Ah, so now you understand? That's fine!..."

When the conversation was over he glanced at Dibich and muttered, clearly counting on the latter's sympathy:

"No denying it used to be short and simple: an adjutant is an adjutant. So you're a regular offi-

cer?" he repeated, glancing at the documents. "No?... Hm, when were you made a lieutenant?... Did you command a company?... Oh, a whole battalion you say?... Weren't you recommended for a captaincy?"

"What has all this to do with the commissar's instructions?" asked Dibich irritably.

Without deigning to answer, Zubinsky took a sheet of paper, dipped his pen into an enormous imitation cut-glass inkwell, and made circles in the air about some invisible point as though getting up steam for a signature as remarkable as himself. But he interrupted his circling to ask:

"Why not join the Red Army? You're a specialist with plenty of fighting experience, and we need specialists."

"I'm not well," said Dibich curtly.

"Best place to get well is in the army. We'll feed you up in a jiffy on our rations."

"I'm not a pig to be fed up!" blurted out Dibich with a flush of indignation. "If they let people like you recruit men for the army, I feel sorry for the army."

Zubinsky did not even raise his eyes.

"Calm yourself, lieutenant, calm yourself," he said, once more dipping his pen in the ink and concentrating on the paper.

"I'm not a lieutenant any more, I'll have you know! No more a lieutenant than you're an adjutant!" said Dibich in a rage.

Zubinsky calmly wrote the note, ornamenting it with a signature that was indeed acrobatic.

"Nothing to get excited about, comrade. Ought to appreciate people ready to do you a favour. Here, take this paper to the Secretary of the Executive Committee, Comrade Izvekov. If he doesn't help you, come back to me. I'm not one of your petty, uncultured people, and I understand your situation."

"You can be sure I shall never trouble you again!" answered Dibich viciously, and went out without saying goodbye.

Of late he found himself prey to violent attacks of temper. Having been a captive for so long, during which time he had been forced to restrain himself and hide any sign of an independent spirit, he now found difficulty in controlling his emotions. Too many and too senseless were the obstacles barring his way at every step! But he quickly took himself in hand after such attacks, realizing their futility, as a person realizes the futility of beating the air against swarms of mosquitoes.

He immediately felt better once he was outside. A remarkable change had taken place in the weather while he was in the commissar's office.

When he had entered, the sky had been blue and everything had been flooded with sunlight, suggesting a hot day ahead. But now a cold wind was bending the frightened trees in the front yards and the streets were shrouded in shadow. Stratas of cloud went rushing across the sky and it was clear that somewhere a spring torrent, perhaps with hail, was already falling.

"That'd be the last straw—to get myself soaked," thought Dibich, quickening his steps and lowering his head against the wind.

Down the street swept papers and straw and dry leaves and manure, and all this rubbish was whirled into columns and funnels that went dancing quadrilles in the air and would undoubtedly have buried the streets completely had it not been for the wind. Everything wailed and sang: sighs swept over the iron roofs of the houses, shrieks were let out by the swaying electric wires, reports like pistol shots came from slamming doors and gates. People ran for shelter.

Dibich had almost reached his destination—a large building banked with trees and bushes cavorting in the wind—when he was confronted by a slanting wall of shifting, roaring, leaden water that appeared as suddenly as though it had stepped out from behind a corner. In his haste to reach the porch of the building, he ran straight into the

deluge. In the twinkling of an eye he was covered with dark spots which immediately merged into rivulets running down his shoulders, breast and knees. Dibich felt his whole body seized by prickling cold.

He was wet through by the time he joined the group of people on the porch. He shook himself and stood watching the heavy drops smack the earth, the star bursts of white bubbles on the asphalt, the water foaming in ever more furious streams from the drain pipes on either side of the entrance, the flood swelling and overflowing the gutters.

In front of the entrance a dripping chauffeur was fussing with the engine of a long, shiny Mercedes. He was trying to get the hood up, but the machine was already filled with water whose lively flow over radiator and mudguards and even the black leather upholstery, gave it the appearance of a submissive beast caught in a downpour.

At that moment a stocky man of less than average height hastened out of the entrance hall. He had a swarthy face with a sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of his straight nose, and was wearing a white Russian blouse unbuttoned at the neck. He lifted a fist in which his cap was clutched and gave a short whistle.

"That's a cloudburst for you all right!" he said with obvious satisfaction.

In businesslike manner he glanced up at what had been the sky, and was at the moment a ceiling of banked clouds which now thinned, now thickened, as they were driven by squalls of wind and water. Dibich noted something presumptuously self-assertive in that glance, as though there were not the slightest doubt in the mind of this small man that it was within his power to immediately stop the downpour or increase its intensity. And in that second it seemed to Dibich that he had seen that face somewhere, a face with a prominent jaw, a straight mouth, and equally straight brown eyebrows almost meeting at the bridge of the nose. But Dibich could not recatch his fleeting recollection or get a better look at the man, for after that one notable glance at the clouds, the latter tossed on his cap and calmly walked over to the machine, seeming to intentionally retard his steps. Without a word he lent the chauffeur a skilful hand in pulling up the hood, then climbed in next to him on the front seat and they drove off, ploughing like a boat through the noisy river flooding the road. Two little boys in ragged pants and shirts plastered to their bodies appeared out of nowhere and went shouting in the wake of the machine, dissolving in the curtain of water like puppets in a Chinese shadow show.

Dibich went into the entrance hall.

In a large and unexpectedly fine room on the second floor he found half a dozen people waiting to be received and a shingled secretary sitting at a table near a door with a brass knob whose polish would have done credit to any ship. He was told that Izvekov would not return for at least an hour, that ten people were ahead of him on the waiting list, and that therefore it was useless to wait—Izvekov could not possibly see all of them. But Dibich was firm. He had his name added to the list, sat down along with the others, and experienced the pleasant conviction that here his wanderings would come to an end. It was a relief to be sitting in this comfortable armchair, lulled to sleep by the faint warmth emanating from the clean walls and the soothing silence which seemed to be competing with the splash of the rain beyond the windows. Chilled by his wet clothes, he settled deeper in the chair and must have immediately dozed off, for suddenly he found himself leaning against a parapet above the bow of a steamer, watching a sun-burnt youth in the bow waving a coil of rope above his head, then flinging it onto the pier, so that it uncurled like a snake in the air and struck the iron roof of the shipping office, and the captain on the bridge put his mouth to the speaking tube and called hoarsely down to the engine room: "Stop! Reverse!" Then everything fumed and

seethed and roared beneath the paddle wheel and the steamer trembled and the passengers scuffled noisily from the upper to the lower deck and the captain once more shouted: "Stop!"—and Dibich woke up.

He saw the people in the waiting room get up with a scraping of chairs as that same swarthy little man with his cap in his fist swiftly and noisily crossed the floor, flung open the door with the brass knob and disappeared inside, while the shingled secretary disappeared behind him, closing the door. Dibich realized that he must have fallen very soundly asleep. He wished to ask the people impatiently pacing the floor who the man was, but the door was opened once more and the secretary stood there looking at him steadily, with a new expression in her eyes.

"Comrade Dibich, if you please," she said.

He was not at all prepared for this invitation, and shifted uncertainly in his chair, but she repeated with a convincing nod of her head:

"Yes, it's you Comrade Izvekov has asked to see."

Dibich adjusted his tunic, pushing the fulness to the back under his belt, and this pulling of himself together seemed to drive off his weariness, so that he achieved the proper military bearing when he entered the office. This was the first contact he had ever had with what he considered an important

Soviet official, who furthermore was not a military man, and he had no idea how he should conduct himself.

Izvekov stood motionless in front of his desk looking steadily at his visitor from beneath lifted, ruler-straight eyebrows.

"Your name is Dibich? Sit down," he said while he himself walked behind his desk without taking his eyes off his visitor and sat down first.

Suddenly Dibich again realized, and this time with complete conviction, that he had seen this man before, but where—he could not remember. Involuntarily he centred his attention on Izvekov's golden-brown eyes and the light sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of his nose, so unusual for one of his dark complexion. For a few seconds they silently studied each other, until Izvekov asked peremptorily:

"Didn't you command battalion two of the eighth infantry regiment?"

"Yes I did. I was lieutenant in regiment eight of the reserves."

"Well, I would never have known you if it wasn't for that remarkable name of yours!" said Izvekov with a shake of his head which might have expressed either reproach or sympathy.

"I seem to have seen you before, but I can't place you. Perhaps we met at the front?"

"Remember Lomov? Private Lomov of company six, in your battalion?"

"Lomov!" cried Dibich, starting up. "Lomov, the scout!"

"A fine scout I was! A scout because you made me one," smiled Izvekov.

This subtle smile, both shy and mocking, was the missing link which, when supplied, enabled Dibich not only to recognize Izvekov as one of his former soldiers, but to remember everything associated with the name of Lomov....

He was taken back to the southwestern front during the May drive of General Brusilov's army, a drive which mortally wounded the morale of the Austro-Hungarians and revived the spirits of the Russians, filling them with complete faith in the inexhaustible strength of their people.

As commander of the company, Dibich fought his way forward over two hundred versts. Toward the end of the march the battalion commander was seriously wounded, and Dibich, who had recently been awarded the Order of St. Anna, was appointed in his place. At that time the Austrians had been substituted on many sectors by German units, rushed to the rescue of their defeated allies who were retreating in panic. However, the Germans were unable to restore the front line, broken and demoralized by the Russian break-through, and

they limited themselves to trying to prevent an expansion of the break, which would threaten their flank on the north and the Austro-Hungarian front on the south. The German infantry, transferred from the west where they had become hardened in battles with the French, were thrown into counterattacks against the Russians, already suffering from lack of reserves after extensive fighting and marching. In order to create an unbroken front, the Germans resolutely defended and strengthened their new lines, at the same time trying to take back strategic positions by throwing themselves into attack after attack against the Russians.

Dibich's battalion became aware of the change in their opponent early one morning when a minor height captured the evening before suddenly became the target of fire from light artillery which the Austrians had not possessed. Dibich had already been warned by regiment headquarters that Germans had appeared opposite his neighbours to right and left, that counterattacks might be expected, and that the height must be held by all means. Before the enemy artillery opened up, he ordered his men to dig in. Later he ran under fire from one shelter to another to inspect the position of his battalion and order company six to retire to a wood on the very summit, where it was to construct a reserve line of defence. He did not

open return fire, but energetically got ready to repulse any attack, while painstakingly studying the enemy's guns and position. However, the artillery fire of the Germans was followed all the rest of the day by a strange quiet, as though the enemy considered such a stunning announcement of its presence quite sufficient.

Feeling that a night attack was possible, Dibich held a conference of company commanders at dusk in his unfinished dugout. He heard reports on the progress being made in strengthening the height and urged speed in the work. He looked upon these officers not so much as his subordinates, as men who until recently had been colleagues and friends of equal rank, and for that reason he realized that they were as much at a loss to understand the enemy's silence as he was, and that they were upset by this fact. Everyone admitted that under the circumstances the most important thing was effective reconnaissance, and Dibich decided that with the onset of darkness, every company with the exception of the sixth should send out a scout unit on their sector with the order to penetrate enemy lines and capture a "tongue."

When this decision had been made and the meeting was over, the commander of company six, an ensign of the reserves who was Dibich's partner in chess games, lingered behind to report an

unpleasant situation: with the last batch of reinforcements a private Lomov had arrived in his company, who was reported to be carrying on dangerous conversations with the soldiers about the purposelessness of war for the common man. This new soldier had undergone training in Nizhni Novgorod, and before he was enlisted had been a draftsman at the Sormovo factory. He was well educated, but the keen nose of the sergeant-major who made the report had scented him out as being untrustworthy.

"Hm," said Dibich after a moment's consideration. "Put him in the reconnaissance for a while. Maybe that will teach him a thing or two. I'll give orders to have an experienced scout go along with him on tonight's assignment."

By nightfall the uneasiness occasioned by the continued silence had become unbearable. Low clouds merged with the dark earth. By the time the scouts were sent out, it had become so inky black that you could not see the fingers of your own hand. Some time later Dibich heard shots to his right which were followed by machine-gun fire. Almost immediately a running rifle barrage came from far away to the left. Dibich realized that this had been occasioned by his scouts, and in his nervousness he consumed more tobacco in an hour than he usually consumed in a day.

Suddenly a liaison man rushed in to announce that a "tongue" had been captured and that the man was a German. Dibich jumped in glee like a little boy, hugged the soldier and cried:

"Hurry, hurry! Have them bring him to me. And give the fellow who captured him a new pair of boots—or even an extra furlough, damn it all! That's the stuff!"

Only after the captured German had been questioned and shipped off to regiment headquarters did Dibich learn who had earned the promised furlough. It was the green scout from company six. He was the only one of all those sent out who had been lucky enough to capture a live German, and he had done it under extraordinary circumstances.

At the appointed moment a scout unit of six including Lomov had climbed out of the trenches and crawled down the hill. A meadow covered with young grass descended for about two hundred and twenty-five yards to a shallow gulley overgrown with alder trees and wild cherries. Beyond the stream flowing through the gulley came another stretch of even meadowland ending in a low ridge. It was this ridge, representing the enemy's front line that was to be reached without the scouts being detected. What extended beyond—nobody knew.

The head of the unit was a sergeant who was highly displeased with the fact that they had given

him an inexperienced scout, and one from a different company to boot. He managed only to ask Lomov his name and order him to stick close to him. Almost as soon as they set out down the slope the unit broke up into pairs, with Lomov and the sergeant in the middle. The end pairs gradually moved off to either side, so that the traces they left, had they been visible, would have looked like a fan. But nothing was visible in the blackness of the night. As soon as the end pairs moved off, Lomov lost sight of their shadows, while the rustle of the grass through which they crawled became fainter and fainter until it died away entirely.

Lomov now heard only the sergeant and himself: the crack of an old, dry twig, the sliding of knees and elbows against the earth, the sound of quick breathing through open mouths; the rubbing, more imagined than actual, of their rifles against their backs; the ceaseless throbbing of their own heartbeats. The world of darkness was wrapped in silence, but this silence was filled with the multitudinous life in grass and ground. Yet the murmur of this life formed an isolated layer of sound hovering above the sound of their heartbeats and the surrounding silence.

Almost as soon as Lomov got down on his hands and knees he became soaked with dew; and the moisture quickly seeped through his clothes,

creating the impression that he was crawling through water, for his face was also wet, as were his back and chest. But while his chest was cold from the earth, his back was warm from the hot dew of his own perspiration. In his fist he clutched a long pair of heavy steel shears for clipping barbed-wire entanglements which the enemy might have erected in front of their trenches. The shears represented a painful encumbrance, for whenever he leaned on his fist the steel dug into his palm and fingers. But he dared not stick them into his belt for fear they would slip out and become lost in the grass. He was tempted by the thought that in this darkness there was no reason why he and the sergeant should not stand up and walk upright—they could not be seen anyhow. But he dismissed the thought with the realization that a chance rocket or searchlight might expose them, and that would be the end of everything. He kept impressing upon himself the fact that it was as useless for him to keep thinking about such things as it had been for him to object when they had appointed him to the reconnaissance, an appointment which he was sure spelled his doom.

It seemed to Lomov that they had been crawling for ages and must be near the stream in the gulley. But suddenly a nightingale began to twitter, and he figured from the sound that they must still be

quite some distance from the water. The twittering was followed by trills and whistles and flute-like notes. Lomov counted ten trills before the panting sergeant at his side whispered hoarsely, "Hear that? The bastard!" and gave a sigh which also bore some resemblance to the twitter of a bird.

The song of the nightingale transported Lomov back to the days of his youth. As he crawled and listened he envisioned himself on Green Island among the blue willows where the nightingales mingled their melody with the quiet plashing of the waves on the sandy riverbank. There lay the Volga, all pearly in the moonlight; a red buoy bobbed on the water of the channel; a fantastic barge bristling with towers and turrets like a castle in the fairy kingdom of Tsar Dodon went floating past, while motionless on the sand sat little Kirill Izvekov, his arms locked about his knees, dreaming about what he would be like when he grew up. When circumstances forced him to forget that he was Kirill Izvekov? When he called himself Lomov? When, at this very moment, with the Green Island of his youth incalculably far away, the wet and weary private Lomov was crawling along, bent like a hairpin, dragging a rifle and a pair of steel shears, drinking in the scent of wild cherry and watching the dark border of alder bushes along the stream growing nearer and nearer?

The sergeant pulled himself up when he reached the bushes, and Lomov also got onto his feet. They rested a moment, stretched their legs, swung the rifles off their shoulders, and entered the thickets. Their eyes had become so accustomed to the darkness that they could distinguish the shadowy trunks and curly crowns of the trees. The gulley was not deep. Feeling their way step by step, they descended to the stream. They could clearly hear the lazy lapping of the water. The nightingale continued trilling above their heads. Soon the black lacquer of the surface shone vaguely between the foliage. A minute later they could make out the entire stream. It was only three steps in width. At the very edge they supported themselves against some large trees. Probably they were willows.

At that moment they heard scattered shots in the distance followed by the rattle of a machine gun. Lomov glanced at his chief. The latter did not move. When the firing was over he whispered: "We'll wait a bit." Once again they heard shots, just as far away but from the other side, and then again there was silence.

Suddenly Lomov noticed two shadows leaping across the stream just in front of him, and heard two thumps on the earth followed by the click and clatter of pebbles on the bank. Two men had crossed the stream and were now standing straight

and motionless, listening. Their outlines could be distinctly made out against the polished black of the water. Two guesses merged in Lomov's mind: these were friends; these were enemies. Enemies might be setting out on reconnaissance; friends might be returning, and have become lost in the thickets. With new powers of vision like those of a night bird, he made out the contours of the helmets worn by the men and realized that they were German. At the same time he was startled by an inhuman voice: it was the sergeant giving a command.

The command was a dreadful shriek that could scarcely have issued from a human throat:

"Swing your butt!"

At the same time the sergeant threw himself at the nearest shadow.

Lomov's palms immediately became wet with perspiration and his back seemed to separate from the rest of his body. In order to properly grasp his rifle he should have thrown the shears away. But without thinking what he was doing, he swung back his fist instead of opening it, and with all his force drove the shears into the shadow to the left, which had ducked on hearing the cry. The blow was soft and moist, and Lomov saw that the shadow immediately became one with the ground. And still without thinking what he was doing he seized

his gun in both hands and turned to the right, noticing that the other shadow was bending with uplifted arm over the prone sergeant. Lomov jumped up and rushed forward, jamming his bayonet beneath the uplifted arm with all the force of his catapulting body. He remembered only one sensation; how difficult and clumsy it was to pull out the bayonet. Then he heard the sergeant groan:

"Tie up the first fellow!"

Lomov rushed over. The German was lying face downward. Lomov put his knees on his shoulders and twisted back his arms, binding them securely with his belt.

"Is he alive?" asked the sergeant.

"He's breathing," answered Lomov.

"Stuff his mouth."

Lomov turned the man's head, which was pressed by the helmet against the pebbles, felt for his mouth, and forced a good half of his cap into it. Then he stood up and wiped his face on his wet sleeve.

Everything was as it had been before. The nightingale continued trilling its song. The stream murmured imperturbably.

As though awakening from a dream, Lomov realized that he had killed the second German with his bayonet. He went over to the sergeant. The latter had received a severe rifle blow on the shoul-

der, but he declined Lomov's offer to help him walk. They divided their tasks so that the sergeant carried the captured rifles and Lomov the wounded German. They reached their trenches in a state of complete exhaustion.

It was already growing light when Lomov gave Dibich an account of what had happened. The sergeant was unable to report because he was having his wound dressed. Lomov's clothes were still wet, and he stood there shivering in the chill of the morning, looking small and frail even in the low dugout, and it was strange to hear his calm report, so coherent in spite of its brevity, and to look into eyes whose golden gleam flared and faded derisively in the lamplight.

"Very good," remarked Dibich. "You have rendered a double service: first, you have brought us a 'tongue,' and secondly, you have intercepted enemy reconnaissance. A good beginning."

Lomov said nothing.

"Don't you know how to answer?"

"Happy to serve, sir," Lomov narrowed his eyes slightly.

"You have brought honour to company six."

"Ours is a good company. If I hadn't done it, someone else would."

"Your words are commendable. Well, now, what about your views on war, eh? Talk others out

of fighting, but don't seem to mind doing it yourself. How is that to be understood?"

Lomov shifted from one foot to the other. Dibich could not draw his eyes away from the younger man's steady gaze.

"Will you permit me to answer, sir?"

"Certainly. I should like to know what you preach to the soldiers in your company."

"For me, war is one thing—a soldier's loyalty another. Everyone has his own opinion of war. A matter of viewpoint. But only a coward would refuse to save his comrades at the front. There is no contradiction here."

Lomov uttered these words even more calmly than he had described the taking of the "tongue," and they sounded even more intelligent and indisputable—even pedantically so. At the same time, Dibich could see that it was not easy for Lomov to maintain this calmness, and he guessed that he was shivering less from cold than from suppressed emotion. He would shudder as though his entire body were seized by a convulsion, and each shudder seemed to reinforce his calmness, and was so infectious that Dibich found himself shuddering too.

Dibich rose and said:

"Well, listen here: I am not concerned with your viewpoint, but you must keep it to yourself.

A war is on, and no one has a right to interfere. At any rate, you will not be allowed to."

He stopped. Lomov waited in silence.

"And please drop teachings which denounce individual cowardice while sponsoring mass cowardice, the cowardice of the whole army, of the whole of Russia. To want everyone to be against war is to want everyone to be a coward."

Still Lomov did not answer. His frozen silence expressed his disagreement, and Dibich had all he could do to keep from raising his voice.

"Don't forget that you are a soldier," he said.

"Yes sir," replied Lomov in military style, but in a tone that was not quite serious and contained a subtle shade of ridicule.

"What do you mean 'yes sir'? Why should you answer 'yes sir' when you are being spoken to as man to man? Do you agree with me? Or do you think there is no point in our army's advancing, no point in shedding our blood?"

"Will you allow me to explain?"

"Yes, of course, go ahead!"

"It seems to me that to recognize a mistake is to show courage rather than cowardice. And what is this war if not a mistake?"

"Very well," said Dibich, taking himself in hand.

"It is my duty as officer and commander to warn you. You had better stop holding discussions on this

subject in your company. And remember that the military tribunal uses a different language than that in which I have spoken with you. You may go."

Dibich gave no more thought either to the strange private from company six or to the ideas he had inspired, for from that hour on he had no time for anything but his immediate task. The Germans began an attack just before sunrise. In the first two days of fighting they cut off the battalion from its regiment, surrounded the height, and continued alternating artillery barrages with infantry attacks until the wounded Dibich was taken prisoner. Company six fought to the very end on the summit of the hill, defending an outpost which had become a forepost....

Here in the office of Kirill Izvekov, Dibich once more saw the look in his eye which he remembered so well, a look which seemed struggling with a mocking smile, as though Izvekov were embarrassed by the smile but unable to suppress it.

"So this is what fate has brought you to," said Dibich.

"Why fate? We worked toward this."

"Toward what? Toward defeat?" asked Dibich bitterly but irresolutely.

"Toward the defeat of the tsarist army, so that we could proceed to the victory of the workers' and peasants' army."

Dibich observed that the mockery had faded from Izvekov's eyes. He turned away and said after a pause, as though wishing to change the subject:

"Your company six fought valiantly."

"Yes," replied Izvekov with a shake of his head.

"Valiantly, but futilely."

"Unfortunately the same thing might be said about the entire war."

"You think so?" said Izvekov quickly, placing his elbows on the table. "That is not true. This war helped the masses find a path to the future. Do you call that futile?"

"But you yourself have said that the fighting of company six was futile."

"Yes, we lost the battle. But a part of the company survived; some of the men escaped with their lives. Naturally you don't know this, for you had the misfortune of being taken prisoner by the Germans. But those who remained alive have now become part of a new army, an army which is fighting for an end that could not be achieved by the old army in that war, but which became clear to the people during its process. They are fighting for their freedom."

"I understand," said Dibich with an almost imperceptible shrug. "The Lomovs lost the war, and the Izvekova won it."

Izvekov smiled, but immediately pinched off the smile with the tips of his fingers and even gave a little jump of satisfaction at having found just what he wanted to say.

"That's it! I can see that for you, what happened during the war was one thing, and what is happening now is another. But that is entirely wrong! The people who were there then are here now. Their lives have changed, but are still going on."

"Who are you after all, Lomov or Izvekov?" asked Dibich with genuine curiosity, but without concealing his irony.

"Is there any difference?" asked Izvekov with a frank smile.

"It looks as though we were continuing the conversation begun in my dugout three years ago. And it also looks as though ... we had changed places, don't you think so?" said Dibich clutching his damp tunic and pulling it away from his body, shuddering as he did so. "It seems I am as wet now as you were then."

"I'm wet now too," said Izvekov simply, feeling his own shoulders. "Apparently we are both in the same boat. But seriously—you say we have changed places. The fact is that you can occupy my place or a similar one if your convictions are mine."

"It's not convictions I'm worried about at present," murmured Dibich.

He took out the paper Zubinsky had given him and handed it across the desk.

"Have you relatives in Khvalynsk?" asked Izvekov after reading it.

"A mother and sister. It will soon be five years since I have seen them."

"That's a long time. Recently I saw my mother for the first time in nine years. I am from Saratov," said Izvekov in an impulse of confidence which was followed by a moment's thought. "I understand. I think I can help you—I shall write an order for a steamboat ticket."

He took up his pen but held it in midair as he said, as if in answer to his own thoughts:

"Go have a visit and a good rest. But no matter where you are, in Khvalynsk or Saratov, there's no evading this question: have we changed places or not?"

"For three years I have not been in Russia," said Dibich with an effort. "For me everything is new. I don't even recognize my own people any more."

"You knew the army. The soldiers were fond of you. Have a look at the Red Army men. That will help you understand and appreciate a lot of things."

"You'd like me to swallow everything at once—convictions, and the Red Army..."

"At once?" laughed Izvekov. "Why at once? How long have you been in Russia? A month? Nowadays even a day, even an hour means more than a month. It's revolution, Comrade Dibich! That's something to think about!"

"I have nothing to think with!" said Dibich in a broken, constrained voice. "Nothing, do you understand? No brains left! I've eaten them up, understand? The beets weren't enough for me, so I added my own brains. For two years I added my brains to the German beets, understand? Like adding your bread ration to a free bowl of soup. I fed my organism, the cells of my body, with reserves of brain and nerve to keep myself from going mad or becoming a beast, damn it all! These very cells, this very flesh..."

He began pinching his arm, pulling the waxen skin away from the bone. His glance became cloudy and his large, moist brow seemed to bulge forth shiny and yellow, like a bone extracted from meat broth.

"Are you ill?" cried Izvekov, jumping up and rushing to the other side of his desk.

But Dibich's head had already dropped onto his angular knees, and he sank as easily as a baby to the floor.

It cost Izvekov no effort to lift him and carry him over to the divan. Then he rushed over to the door, opened it cautiously and said to the shingled secretary in a very quiet voice:

"Send for a doctor. Immediately. Here in my office."

* 9 *

On returning home, Kirill made no enquiries about Lisa. Too much time had passed since they parted. Just as thoughts of her had lent wings to his spirit during the first few months of his exile, enabling him to escape the dreariness of the remote village in which he found himself, so the knowledge of her later fate represented a crushing burden bearing him down. At that time he first came to appreciate the power that memory wields. He was overwhelmed by it. As long as he regarded his separation from Lisa as something temporary and kept looking forward to the end of his term, when they would begin the life together of which they had both dreamed, she remained with him day and night, though seen darkly, through the veil of the many versts separating them. After her marriage she became a thing of the past, but a past which persistently tortured him. He could not forget her, however he tried. He immediately

ceased mentioning Lisa in his letters to his mother, and, realizing that he had learned of her fate, Vera Nikandrovna also avoided her name. Kirill knew only that Lisa had been forced to marry—who her husband was he could not guess and did not try. In the only letter Lisa had written to him, a letter which arrived during a long, dreary winter when he was most conscious of his utter isolation, she wrote of her marriage, begging him not to blame her, if only for the reason that this marriage brought her nothing but grief. She spoke of having *been given* in marriage, rather than of having married, and therefore, for some time he did not associate the event with the name of Tsvetukhin, Lisa's interest in whom had once caused him jealousy (it was impossible that Meshkov could have given his daughter in marriage to an actor). When the idea that her husband might be Tsvetukhin finally came to him, he unexpectedly experienced a gloating consolation: now Lisa would be punished for her weakness!

With the passing of the years Kirill came to think of her less often, but each recollection arose unexpectedly and inexplicably, catching him off his guard in moments of depression or meditation. Such moments came even after his exile, when he was living under the assumed name of Lomov, ruthlessly training himself to be coolheaded and

self-possessed, while posing as a draughtsman from Vassilsursk, a diligent but none too gifted worker who lived in constant dread of losing his job at the factory. Even then of an evening when he would be walking along the bluff over the Volga admiring the lights of the Nizhni Novgorod fairgrounds, he would suddenly be seized by an inexplicable desire to follow someone up one street and down another until he had overtaken the object of his pursuit, and for a long time he would labour under the illusion that it was Lisa he was pursuing and overtaking. He not only heard her gliding step, he even caught the scent of her breath in the twilight, that delicate, scarcely detectable scent of warm, sweet milk which had so impressed him the first time he had touched her face with his flaming cheek. In his dreams she was even closer to him, but he was able to break off his dreams, whereas he was helpless before the unexpectedness of his fits of memory.

For Vera Nikandrovna, Kirill was at one and the same time the lad she had preserved unchanged in her heart's memory since the day of his arrest, and a completely new, grown-up man who sometimes seemed older than she herself. A whole third of his life had been spent away from her, and this third had been filled with the remarkable activities implied in his letters, the receipt of which rep-

resented the most important events in her life. He wrote to her all during his exile, and when that was over he told her she must not worry if she received no letters for a long time—for a year or even much longer. Actually she heard from him again only when the revolution had taken place. She assumed that his silence was required by his underground activities, something so exalted and sacredly secret, that even her guesses seemed to make her a participant in them. She remained what she had been—a simple schoolteacher. But year after year her thoughts followed so closely in the path of her son, painstakingly deducting from his letters and even from his silence any change in this path, that she involuntarily looked upon herself as more than a simple schoolteacher—as a person distinguished from all others.

When Kirill finally came back, all their conversations, so charged with meaning though sparing of words, assumed the same form: Vera Nikandrovna either listened to her son or answered his questions. For her, these talks were like a continuation of their correspondence. He knew better what could and should be said, and if he remained silent there was no point in asking questions. He said nothing about Lisa, and his mother understood. A crust of forgetfulness had formed over the past which the warmth of memory could no more

penetrate than the sun's rays could melt eternal
snows.

But once a roving ray chanced to illuminate a
dark corner.

Soon after the October Revolution, Vera Nikandrovna moved out of her tiny apartment facing the dusty city square and went to live in the same building where her school was located. She was not used to so much space—two large, bright rooms painted white like classrooms, a huge kitchen and a hallway which alone would have accommodated her old quarters. The apartment reminded her of the old basement flat in which she and Kirill had lived for long years before his arrest. Now when he returned to her in these large rooms, with the shouts and stamping of the children forming a background to their life, it seemed to the mother a continuation of the old days—once more she was living with her son, once more in a school building. The only thing missing was the grating over the windows whose design resembled linked figure eights, and the three Lombardy poplars that had rustled incessantly outside the windows. Yet sometimes Vera Nikandrovna felt lost in all this space and regretted that she could not sit down next to her cozy Dutch stove and throw in a curl of birch bark. Here the stoves were so huge that even the school janitor had difficulty tending them.

Before Kirill had been home a week it became clear to his mother that he would not live with her. He said just the opposite, that his only wish was that they be together; but for practical considerations he required an apartment in the centre of the city, close to the various institutions, whereas the Soldiers' Settlement was out in the suburbs, which meant constant travelling. Vera Nikandrovna could not leave the Settlement. She was kept there not so much by her position as by the long-standing conviction that a change of school had a bad influence on a teacher's work: a teacher should win the confidence of her pupils' parents, and how could they have confidence in her if she hopped about from one place to another? It would be hard for her to live in the centre and impossible for Kirill to live in the suburbs, so they would have to live apart. But her son decided that he would often run out to the Settlement, making it a sort of headquarters, and for that reason he began to collect a library in one of the rooms.

He had long dreamed of owning a library—shelves and shelves of books that could not be moved, and that extended not along the walls, but at right angles to them, so that he could walk and stand between the shelves—stand for a long time in a broken ray of sunlight, pulling out of the tightly packed rows of books the required or de-

sired volume, opening it to the title page, skimming through the index, searching for an unknown page, wondering at a familiar line which unexpectedly revealed some new and delightful idea. In his wandering life of the past, so full of change and vicissitudes, Kirill had never been able to own more than the number of books that could be tied together and carried in one hand, and he had always dreamed of some day owning many, many books.

Now the time had come. Naturally Kirill did not expect to remain in the Soldiers' Settlement forever, or even for long. On the contrary, he knew that he belonged to the times, and the times demanded that a man be detached, for at any moment he would be snatched from his place like a leaf from a branch and carried—heaven only knew where. But there in his mother's room he would have that without which a person could know no peace on this earth—a hearth, a home, a soul's refuge, and for him the soul's refuge of which he would always dream was a library.

"Listen," he said to his mother. "for the present we'll make it out of whatever books you have and the few I have. That'll come to about fifty volumes. But what about shelves?"

"Temporarily you can take the shelves out of the teachers' room—they're not needed there. I

shall buy a cabinet for the teachers' room as soon as I make out the new estimate of expenses."

Not long before this Vera Nikandrovna had been appointed principal of the school, and she somewhat revelled in her administrative responsibilities. Even during discussions of new methods of teaching, she made a point of introducing words like "staff," "estimate," "upkeep" at the expense of more familiar words in her vocabulary such as "plan," "teaching hours," "subject."

Kirill did not like the shelves from the teachers' room. They were narrow and so stained with ink and kerosene that he was inclined to reject them. But a supply of used notebooks designated for lighting stoves was discovered in the teachers' room; the inside of the blue covers was clean and unfaded and Kirill suggested that the shelves might be lined with them. They tried it, and the effect was very satisfactory. Naturally it was necessary to stand the shelves against the wall for the present—it would have looked very queer for only one section to stand sticking out into the room. But Kirill tried it that way first, just to get an idea of the effect when there were many shelves. Apparently this too would be very satisfactory.

Vera Nikandrovna took a knife and opened up the wires clipping together the pages of the notebooks. Then she carefully removed the covers, while

Kirill laid them on the shelves, creasing them over the edges with his rough fingers.

"Oh yes—I forgot to say that today I had a look at the apartment they're giving me."

"Why didn't you tell me? Where is it?"

"A very convenient location. Not far from the Upper Bazaar. In the Shubnikovs' house—know where that is?"

Vera Nikandrovna gave a slight gasp which she quickly suppressed.

"What's the matter?" asked Kirill, without turning around.

"Pricked my finger," she said. "On one of these wires."

"Better be careful. You know what those wires and nails can do."

"And you be careful not to get splinters in your hands." She pushed her hair behind her ear with a nervous gesture.

"We had a case like that in our regiment committee," went on Kirill. "We had just entered a village in the Polessye region. The soldiers caught sight of a samovar standing in one of the yards. Hadn't seen a samovar for ages, so they decided to have tea. One of the fellows started shaving up some wood. Got a splinter in the palm of his hand. ~~Just~~ laughed at it. Two days later we took him to the hospital. Gangrene. How do you like

that—been through the entire war, through all kinds of harrowing experiences and had to meet his fate at an old woman's job!"

"Did he die?"

"No, but they amputated his arm. A fine chap. Member of the committee."

"Now, you see?" said his mother.

"What do you mean—you see? It's you who pricked your finger and the tale was told for your benefit."

"Is it a large apartment?" asked his mother after a pause.

"Sure, like all merchants' apartments. Could ride around it on a bicycle."

"What do you want with such a large one?"

"If you would come live with me..."

"I would if I could."

"I know. I plan to occupy only two of the rooms—there are two rooms with a separate entrance."

Busy with their simple tasks, they did not look at each other. Kirill was dexterously tacking the paper to the underside of the shelves. The books would hold it on the upper side.

"I don't know whether you will enjoy living there," said Vera Nikandrovna.

"In that apartment? Why not? I don't need anything special."

"I know," she said quietly, with a glance at her son. "But there is something special about that apartment."

"Ghosts?"

"Perhaps," she said, trying to laugh.

"That might be true if some evil fate had overtaken the merchant. But so far as I could find out they simply gave him another apartment and took over his house—that's all. I even heard he's working for us somewhere. So where would the ghosts come from?"

He turned to his mother with a smile, and immediately realized that she was not joking. Everything about her was strained: the movements of her drooping hands, the expression of her face, her breathing.... She raised her eyes and found him waiting.

"Shubnikov was Lisa's husband," she said.

His swarthy face seemed to darken; a shade of olive crept into it. He did not move.

"You did not ask me and so I did not tell you," added Vera Nikandrovna as though anticipating his reproach.

He turned around and passed his heavy fists over the shelf, one to either side, and then stood there silent, with his fists apart.

"I have no more paper. You're lagging behind," he said at last.

She handed him a few sheets and he began lining the bottom shelf, bending down and hiding his face. Suddenly he gave a short whistle and straightened up.

"What is it? A splinter? Show me," said Vera Nikandrovna, going over to him.

"It's nothing," he said, biting into the tip of his finger and waving his hand to hold his mother off.

He stopped working and went over to the window, opening it wide. From a distance came the sound of a trolley, the hum of whose motor rose higher and higher, turning into a menacing wail which suddenly broke off. A cow mooed in reply. From behind a bend in the road straggled the returning herd. The sunset tinted the log houses, turning them into picture-book houses. Clouds of dust, rosy with sunset, hung above the cows as though the beasts were bearing them on their horns.

"You said 'was,'" said Kirill through the open window. His mother did not reply, so he became more explicit: "Isn't he her husband now?"

"She left him during the war," answered Vera Nikandrovna.

Once more he became silent and stood gazing for a long time at the settlement, watching the gay rosiness of the houses change to a fiery red, while

the sunset, still flaming, was softened by the golden shadows of approaching evening. The cows moped with satisfaction and desire as they entered their respective yards. Then all became silent.

"Where is she now?" asked Kirill, as though addressing the silence.

"I don't know. She went to live with her father."

"Has she any children?"

"It seems she has a son."

"How old is he?" asked Kirill haltingly, then suddenly turning from the window he went to his mother, quickly took her by the arm and led her to a wooden settee, on which they sat down next to each other.

"I see that you know everything. How did it happen? How could it—how could it have happened? What was the reason? How do you explain it? Why? Why? Why?"

He poured out his questions in a rush, as though once and for all he was tearing away all the knots and tangles restraining his insatiable desire to know all. And his mother, gladdened by this ravenousness, began to speak with the same outpouring with which he had put his questions, telling him all that she and Lisa had lived through on his account, all that she had thought about Lisa, all that she had heard about her or had

guessed—all those minute details which can be detected only by one woman in respect to another, and confided only when she wishes to plumb the very depths, concealing nothing.

Kirill sat with his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands. He did not miss a single word of his mother's account. To be sure he had known Lisa only as Lisa. But she had also been a Meshkov. Formerly the Meshkovs had not existed for him—there had been only Lisa. Probably he had thought of himself too in those distant days as only Kirill. But he was also the son of Izvekov, though he did not remember his father, and the son of a schoolteacher who had trained him to be what he was today. The fact that Lisa was a Meshkov seemed to explain what had happened to her, but this explanation did not satisfy him. It still seemed to him that Lisa had acted against her own nature, and he could not understand why, and he frowned, overwhelmed by the facts so lavishly contributed by his mother. They were so legion that they became a burden. He wanted to make this first discussion of Lisa the last, to draw from it a final conclusion, so he said:

"What, in the final analysis, do you think of her?"

"I think she is too kind."

"Weak-willed?"

"No—kind. Kind to whoever happens to be closest to her at the given moment. Kind in general, in an abstract way."

"In an abstract way?" he repeated with a protesting shrug. "That is worse than being weak-willed. That is being indifferent. But it seems to me you are wrong. Maybe she is just too soft?"

"Maybe she is just too soft," said Vera Nikandrovna, pondering the question together with her son.

They heard heavy steps on the stairs—apparently the janitor coming to put up the samovar.

"But the fact is that she left her husband and took her child with her," said Vera Nikandrovna. "A weak-willed woman could hardly have done that."

"Women leave their husbands out of fear or in desperation. Or because the husbands have become revolting. It is a sign of weakness rather than strength. Besides, time changes people—how long did she live with her husband before she left him? That cannot explain what she did before she was married."

Kirill got up and stretched, as much as to say that the conversation was closed and would never be reopened.

"I hoped I would get to understand," he said calmly. "I haven't been able to and apparently nev-

er shall. And perhaps it is better so.... Let's finish the shelves."

The red glow of the sunset seemed to change the dimensions of the room, like stage lighting, deepening it and making it part of the sun-bright world slipping below the horizon. The door into the hallway was ajar, and the hall was also filled with that silent glow.

The steps on the stairs ceased, and into the hallway stepped a tall, stoop-shouldered man. He paused at the threshold, squinting into the light which fell on his large face with its curling moustache.

"I was told that Comrade Izvolov lived here," he said, carefully selecting his words.

Kirill walked over and glanced sharply at him, then stretched out his arms as though to take hold of something fragile and not very convenient to grasp.

"Is it you, Pyotr Petrovich?" he said softly.

The man took his hand and turned him toward the light, nodding his head as he did so.

"You've grown husky, but haven't changed much."

"And you're still the same," replied Kirill as softly as before.

"Humph!" snorted Pyotr Petrovich, snatching off his cap and running his hand over his head. "Lost all my curls."

They hung out their arms and grasped each other in close embrace, then stepped apart and again began to examine each other, laughing louder and louder and interjecting unintelligible little exclamations as they gradually moved from the hallway into the room. They were as different as possible—Kirill erect, even leaning backward a bit, and a whole head shorter than his guest; Pyotr Petrovich tall and stooped, with long arms and a long neck. But the red glow caused them to merge into one and even resemble each other at that moment, and this resemblance was increased by the noisy joyousness which seized both of them.

"Mother, this is Ragozin!" cried Kirill with a laugh as he again took his friend by the arm.

"So that's what you're like," she breathed almost inaudibly.

She looked at Ragozin as though from some dizzy height, and in that second she glimpsed her son's past and her own past and things in that past which until now it had not been given her to see.

"Yes," muttered Ragozin apologetically, "that's how it is—me myself—you see..."

All three of them smiled like people who had long awaited this meeting and were so overcome at its transpiring that they could find no adequate expression for their feelings, but the incoherence

of the first words that came to their lips expressed exactly what had to be expressed at such a moment.

"So you see . . ." repeated Ragozin with a suggestion of a wink at Kirill. "Here we are again, eh?"

"You haven't changed the least bit! Just like the live original!" said Izvekov, circling about him and touching his sleeve and the frayed edges of his suit coat.

"Why shouldn't I be alive? Now's just the time to be alive!" answered Ragozin.

"And your moustache in rings like that. He always wore his moustache in rings, mother," said Kirill delightedly.

"That's the way they're meant to be worn," asserted Ragozin, touching his moustache.

"Can't you fix us up with something super-extraordinary, mother?"

"Yes, of course!" replied Vera Nikandrovna without interrupting her study of their guest. "The samovar will be ready in just a second."

"Hm—the samovar—that's a fine welcome for you!" said Ragozin in his bellowing voice.

"Of course, mother! The samovar! Can't you think up something better than that?"

"Dear me, what else could we have?" faltered Vera Nikandrovna in some embarrassment.

Thus in such clumsy outbursts passed the first stage of their joy, which then settled calmly on their souls like the gleaming surface of a pool after the passing of a gust of wind. Ragozin examined the bookshelves and picked up pieces of cardboard with the words "History," "Sociology," "Science," printed on them in large letters.

"A fine idea, but where's the library?" he laughed.

"The library's coming."

"A practical person you are."

Now they could study each other calmly, and Ragozin said:

"But it's not the bookshelves that will decide our fate now, what do you think, eh?"

"Of course not. But it won't be decided without them either."

"Like not without higher mathematics, eh?"

"That's it."

"Don't think I'm against all that," said Ragozin with a conciliatory chuckle. "But you're as bristly as a porcupine! Don't like to be teased! Never could stand it as I remember!"

"Oh, I don't mind," said Kirill with sudden shyness, adding boyishly: "It was in exile I got my views on books—met an unusual fellow there, exiled from St. Petersburg. Had a beard almost to his knees."

"A Narodnik, eh?"

"You probably think he was a Socialist-Revolutionary? Nothing of the sort. He claimed to belong to the Book Party. He was a librarian and bibliographer, and our people hid literature behind the bookshelves in his apartment before sending it to places outside of St. Petersburg. It ended in his being exiled. Well, he used to spend his evenings telling us about books—it was a joy to listen to him. Sometimes the tears would trickle down his beard as he talked. Told us about the Elzevirs and Venetian Aldines, or about our Russian free press: *The Bell* and *The Polar Star* and other magazines. Once in his presence I called some little book a *knizhonka*.^{*} He began to tremble all over. 'Do you want me to despise you?' he said. 'Only hypocrites and good-for-nothings use a word like that. A book is life, honour, fame, wealth, ecstasy, inexpressible happiness! Profound love for humanity!' 'Well,' I asked, 'and would you have me call the vicious rot printed by reactionaries also books?' He grew white. 'Rot,' he said, 'is not fit to be printed even in a *knizhonka*.'"

"Interesting," said Ragozin.

"He remembered every book which he had ever owned for even a day. And once he shame-

^{*} Derogatory term for a book.

fully admitted that he was more devoted to books than to people. He told us about a Moscow book collector who began every morning with a prayer for the peace of the soul of Nikolai Novikov, the first Russian publisher and critic of Russian literature. 'I would agree with you that we ought to do away with religion—I am an enlightened person,' said this old collector, 'but you can't do away with religion because every enlightened person should pray for the soul of Nikolai Novikov.'

"I've also met types like that," nodded Ragozin. "And I'd do away with them too, but then who'd teach people to love books?"

"That's right," said Kirill. "I appreciate your serious approach. Well, this booklover infected me with his fever. I could never worship God, but I certainly do worship books."

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," laughed Ragozin, but suddenly added seriously: "There's a place we ought to visit, you and me. Mountains of books! You know we have an Old Goods Department. Well, they've collected a whole warehouse full of abandoned books. Let's go have a look. Not that I have time to do any reading, but there's a couple of things—in the book line—you know—"

"You don't have to apologize, I have no objections," said Kirill magnanimously.

They cast sly glances at each other.

"Porcupine!" repeated Ragozin "Well, apparently your exile wasn't entirely without benefit, once it left you such stirring memories. I used to get fits of thinking—maybe it's my fault the youngster's out there in the wilderness, sucking his thumb along with the bears..."

"You may be my godfather, but that doesn't make you answer for what I did. I climbed up on the cart of my own free will, didn't I? I used to get qualms of conscience too, wondering if I hadn't given my comrades away, you among them. If I'd managed to get those pamphlets distributed on time, maybe nothing would have happened."

"No, everything had been planned ahead by the secret police. They decided to catch everybody at once, and hauled people in right and left. Caught them like fish in a net. It was quite by chance I managed to leap out of it."

The lamp had already been lighted and they were sitting about the table. After a brief account of the years during which they had been parted, they began to speak of what was now constantly occupying their thoughts—the war. But suddenly their conversation was cut off by someone's appearing in the darkened doorway.

"Is it you?" said Vera Nikandrovna, shading her eyes with her hand. "Come in."

There was a second's pause during which Izvekov and Ragozin seemed to be deciding how to accept this interruption of a conversation which had actually just begun. But the next second their attention was involuntarily drawn to the girl who entered, and they simultaneously got up.

The girl kissed Vera Nikandrovna on the cheek and offered her own cheek with the quick, spontaneous movement of a close friend.

"Today is Sunday, so I decided you must be at home," she said, adding with a glance at the men: "I can only stay half an hour."

She spoke softly, but her voice was rich and strong, like the voice of a singer.

"Of course, you never have a minute to spare," said Vera Nikandrovna reproachfully, but with a mother's touch of pride and approval. "Kirill, this is Annochka Parabukina."

Annochka went swiftly and noiselessly over to Kirill, thrusting out, rather than simply extending, her long, slender hand.

"We are acquainted," she said as quietly as before, but even more resonantly, "although it would be only natural if you had forgotten me. I was only this high then." She indicated the height of her breast. "But I would have known you immediately."

After shaking hands with Pyotr Petrovich, she glanced about, and, not finding a chair, went into the next room. Her movements were strangely light and gliding, but in spite of her noiselessness, there was something angular about her walk, and her lightness seemed to stem less from plasticity than from the thinness most apparent in her arms and legs, which were too long, like those of an overgrown child. She brought a chair and sat down next to Vera Nikandrovna. The lamplight fell on her face, showing her short-cropped hair swirling boyishly in the nape of her neck and curling in bright little feminine wisps on ~~her~~ forehead and temples. There was something contradictory about her face: the delicate oval of its contour, the fine mouth and chin, did not harmonize with the severe brows which gave a stern expression to the calm blue eyes.

"What are you looking at?" Vera Nikandrovna asked Kirill, who had remained standing where he was, silently watching Annochka. "She probably looks more like a boy than a girl to you, the little minx!" Vera Nikandrovna lightly passed her hand over Annochka's curls.

"I'm just thinking what an eternity has passed!" answered Kirill, placing his chair so that he could see Annochka better, but quickly replacing it on glancing at Ragozin. He determined to con-

tinue their interrupted conversation at any cost, and suppressed his unexpected embarrassment in order to say what is usually said under such circumstances:

"Well, so where were we?"

But his thoughts strayed, and while he turned to Ragozin, his words were not addressed to him.

"When you look only at yourself, it seems as if nothing has happened: time has been flowing along in its own course without any particular changes. But when you look at others, it's as though you had suddenly dropped from another world! What changes must have taken place in you, if everyone around you has gone through such a complete metamorphosis?!"

"I have become what you were when I first met you," said Annochka, but quickly caught herself and added: "So far as age is concerned—only age!"

She nearly laughed, and bit her lip, and her eyebrows went shooting up, so that her eyes not only lost their severity, but became wondering and mischievous. Everyone smiled and Vera Nikandrovna said pedantically, like at a lesson:

"How old is the girl if nine years before she was half as old as the boy, and now he is one and a half times as old as she is?"

"I don't know how old the girl is, but according to my calculations the boy is now twenty-seven," answered Ragozin, screwing up his eyes.

"How clever you are at figures!" said Kirill. "You ought to be in the Finance Department."

"They're already after me, but so far I've managed to dodge them."

"You won't be dodging them any more!"

"Aren't you ferocious though!"

For Kirill there was something serious in all this joking. He kept leaning to one side to look at Annochka, who was half hidden by the samovar, and what he had said about eternity kept revolving in his mind. On meeting Ragozin again, he found nothing new in the difference between their ages: they continued moving forward in the same relationship. But the appearance of Annochka revealed a change in him which seemed to have occurred momentarily. He had indeed discovered the eternity separating himself from that little towheaded girl whom he scarcely remembered, and the difference between him and her was entirely new. But strangely enough, though Annochka had opened his eyes to the change which had taken place in himself, and while she herself represented someone entirely new, she reminded him of something unchanging. In no way did she resemble Lisa, yet it was Lisa whom Kirill saw in her, and the thing

that was most strange for him was the fact that while he had changed so remarkably, and that while they were now in ranks so far apart, Lisa had not changed in the slightest—she was still eighteen years old and as pretty as ever, perhaps even prettier. Kirill was not used to such a sense of duality, and he found it both pleasant and unpleasant.

"Why are you in such a hurry?" asked Vera Nikandrovna.

"Egor Pavlovich has promised to rehearse with us this evening."

"Who is he?" asked Kirill.

"The head of our dramatic circle. Tsvetukhin, the actor."

"Tsvetukhin? Is he still alive?"

"Why not? He's not so old," replied Annochka, somewhat offended.

"I meant to say, is he still here?" Kirill corrected himself.

Naturally Tsvetukhin had to put in his appearance along with Lisa—it could not be otherwise.

"I forgot to tell you that Annochka is going to act on the stage of the new theatre," said Vera Nikandrovna with that elusive note, half pride, half reproach, with which rising actors are mentioned. "She has already chosen her profession."

"Do you mean to imply that others have not yet chosen theirs?" laughed Kirill.

"That doesn't apply to you," answered his mother simply. "You yourself have said that as soon as it is possible you are going to study for some profession. You have to be something. You can't go on without any speciality at all."

"Well, well!" laughed Kirill, and threw his arm over Ragozin's shoulder as though asking for sympathy. "You can study politics all your life and still remain a nobody, eh, Pyotr Petrovich? Have to be something or other, but politics—that's nothing. Building society, creating a new world, making over the whole of life—what kind of a profession is that? If you wrote poetry, now, that would be different—that's a profession. But what, after all, does a poet do? What is his business?"

"He makes things," said Ragozin.

"What kind of things? You can't plough with a sonnet, you can't eat out of an ode! But they call it a profession!"

"Are you so contemptuous of art?" asked An-nochka severely.

"No, I am very fond of art," said Kirill, pausing for a moment. "But I take art very seriously. More than that—I myself should like to serve art, to be counted among those working in the field of art, for I should like to wield an influence over people. Is it not a great art to be able to influence

people? At present I am only learning a trade—how to organize and direct others. But I know that this trade can be elevated to great heights, to the level of art. When I shall have mastered all the means and instruments for influencing people, I shall be transformed from a craftsman into an artist. If I can learn to build a new society, I shall enjoy a rapture no less than that of an actor who has learned to move his audience to tears. I shall know the joy of an artist when I see that a bit of the past has been cleaved away from the hard life of the people, and that the strong, wholesome, joyous order I would establish is beginning to wield its influence over human relations and daily life. Oh yes! I am very fond of art," repeated Kirill convincingly, giving Ragozin's shoulder a tight squeeze and smiling at his mother. "We'll manage to be something or other yet, you and I, Pyotr Petrovich. Something or other!"

"Is he right?" said Vera Nikandrovna to Ragozin, not because she needed any confirmation of her son's rightness, but because she wanted to express her own faith in it. With a nod of assent, Ragozin removed Kirill's hand from his shoulder and pressed it.

"Don't you think that I too am capable of loving art very seriously?" asked Annochka in the same severe tone.

"Why, have I denied it?" he asked anxiously. "I only wanted to assure you that I was not on bad terms with art."

"I drew my conclusions from the disparaging way you spoke about poetry."

"Did I speak disparagingly of poetry?"

"Not disparagingly," said Annochka with a shake of her head as she searched for the right word. "Superciliously."

"Superciliously? Surely not. That's a monopoly of the poets themselves. They think that writing poetry is incomparably more important than making revolutions. But maybe you think the same thing?"

Without answering Annochka leaned over to Vera Nikandrovna and whispered mischievously:

"Another 'unsatisfactory' for 'Human Happiness.'"

"'Human Happiness'?" asked Kirill.

"That was in their school," explained Vera Nikandrovna with a smile. "They called 'Human Happiness' . . . What was it you called 'Human Happiness,' Annochka?"

"You see I just graduated from the *gymnasium*—oh I know it's called simply school now—" said Annochka quickly, "and we had nicknames for all our subjects. That is, we girls had. For example, we called literature 'Sacred Dreams.' In

our last year we had Political Economy and the Constitution, and we called them 'Human Happiness.' I always used to get 'unsatisfactory' for 'Human Happiness.'"

"Just see how hard 'Human Happiness' comes!" laughed Ragozin.

"But we were talking about 'Sacred Dreams,'" said Kirill eagerly and without smiling as he glanced at Annochka.

"I guess you're right," she said, returning his glance with a steady gaze. "But it seems to me you place a higher value on 'Human Happiness' than on 'Sacred Dreams.' And because you expect everybody to think like you do, you gave me an 'unsatisfactory' the very first time we met."

"Because you spoke a lot of fol-de-rol," said Vera Nikandrovna.

Kirill pressed his fingers over his lips to hide a smile as he said:

"But I don't want everybody to think as I do. I only want them to have the same thoughts as I have."

"Your demands are not very great, but I doubt that I shall be able to fulfil them."

"Why not, if they aren't very great?"

"The differences in our thinking became clear only too soon."

"For example?"

"For example, why did you suddenly change your attitude the minute I mentioned Tsvetukhin?"

"I don't know what he's like nowadays," said Kirill, dropping his eyes, "but I couldn't stand him before. He's as conceited as a peacock."

"What's your name? I know your first name's Kirill, but what's your patronymic?" asked Annochka suddenly.

"What do you call me when I'm not around?"

"I don't call you anything when you're not around."

"You little vixen," smiled Vera Nikandrovna. "Nikolayevich is his patronymic—Nikolayevich."

"Then let me give you a word of advice, Kirill Nikolayevich. Don't go expressing opinions about people you don't even know!"

"That's right," said Vera Nikandrovna. "Tsvetukhin is a simple and courageous man."

Annochka bent down and gave Vera Nikandrovna another of her swift kisses.

"I must go," she said. Then she added as she held Vera Nikandrovna's head in her hands and nodded her own head to emphasize her words: "A very simple and courageous man!"

Vera Nikandrovna took Annochka's hands and looked deep into her eyes:

"How is Olga Ivanovna?" she asked.

"Mother is very bad," answered Annochka off-handedly, but in such a way that it was impossible to question her further on this subject. Then she straightened up and went around the table to say goodbye to Kirill.

"Very well," he said suddenly and awkwardly, "I shall take your advice. Don't be angry."

"I'm not angry," she replied simply, and was gone in a trice.

Nobody said anything for a minute, until Ragozin sighed and asked:

"I hear they've found you an apartment. Are you moving?"

"No, I don't like the place."

"You don't say! Turning down a bourgeois mansion like that!"

"Yes," said Kirill, obviously thinking of something else. "Sticking my nose up, brother..."

* 10 *

On a windless day in late spring, Pastukhov stepped off the porch of Dorogomilov's house wearing an oldish top coat—tan with a white thread through it. First he glanced up to see whether the sky was clouded, then he glanced about to see in which direction it would be most pleasant to take a walk, then he glanced down to see whether it

was muddy. Out on the sidewalk he noticed three little boys of about the same age sitting with their backs to the sunlit façade of the house, their legs sprawling in front of them. The asphalt was spotted with spit. They turned up their faces to look at Pastukhov, waiting to see whether he would say anything or go silently on his way. He recognized one of the dirty little faces as belonging to his Alyosha.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, walking over.

"Playing," answered Alyosha.

"What are you playing?"

"Seeing who can spit furthest."

"Hm," observed Pastukhov irresolutely, adding in an icy tone through lips that scarcely moved: "Go home immediately and tell your mother that I called you a rowdy and asked them not to let you out on the street again."

He glanced at the spitters. Where had they ever come from? This house had an inexplicable power of attracting little boys. They flocked to it like wasps to a vineyard. It was impossible to keep Alyosha away from them: out on the street he met one group of boys, in the garden another, in the back hallway a third, and in Arseni Romanovich's rooms a fourth. Perhaps there was nothing wrong in his meeting them (Alexander Vladimirovich

considered that children should grow up like wheat in the fields, among their own kind, and not like geraniums, each in its own pot), but there were too many of these little boys. Olga Adamovna objected to being sent to town on various household errands and leaving Alyosha to his own devices. She even protested that going to market was not included in her duties. But Pastukhov could hardly allow the grande dame to sit at home while his Asya did the marketing! It was all the fault of the times. There was nothing to be done about it. That was it—the times. In other words, all these inconveniences were only temporary: when this awful fratricide was over, Alexander Vladimirovich would return to the bird's-eye maple in his Petrograd study. In the meantime, they would have to put up with it.

In the final analysis, this was costing Pastukhov more than most others. He was used to working, and to having theatres put on his plays. But now the theatres only talked about work; actually they did nothing, because they had stopped putting on Pastukhov's plays. The theatres talked about a repertory of Greek and Roman classics, Sophocles and Aristophanes, about plays of exalted passions, Shakespeare and Schiller, about folk performances on public squares, about pageants with hundreds of participants, about an audience that felt and

acted along with the actors. But they did not talk about Pastukhov, about his well-known dramas and his comedies which, as a matter of fact, were not bad at all. After all, his plays had been staged not only at the Korsh and the Nezlobin theatres, but even at the Imperial Theatre in Petrograd. Sometimes actor friends would meet him on the street, and after kissing him and thundering a few greetings in cracked voices—"How's life? What's the news") would enter upon vehement asseverations that he alone was capable of writing what the stage needed today—something fine, elevated, in the grand style—"Enormous, understand? Enormous!") because Pastukhov was the only one left of those who could undertake such a thing—"Small fry, understand? Well, who is there? No one. Simply no one!"). When the first onslaught was exhausted, they would calm down to cooing lyricisms which gave Pastukhov to understand that even if he did write his elevated plays nobody would put them on, because the present epoch had brought with it a search for the new, which implied a denunciation of the old. Everybody was searching for something, without knowing what, but they all rejected ready-made forms, anything that had crystallized into a style of its own. And Pastukhov's greatest virtue was that he had his own style, in other words, that his form was mature.

("Pastukhov—you're a genre in yourself, understand?—you simply will not be understood—not understood in the least. And who is there capable of appreciating you? Who?")

It seemed that there was no point in writing. Pastukhov himself could see that it was impossible to write. A shifting of the earth's crust had taken place—that was how he saw it. And while formerly he had composed scene after scene of his plays with the ease and delight of playing a game, he now could hear the working of his imagination when he wrote, like the squeaking of rusty wheels. Formerly he had worked as involuntarily as he had digested his food. Now work was a torture for him because he did not know what he should do. When the crust of the entire earth had shifted, was it likely that something as insignificant as his work could remain intact? Everything was tottering in this earthquake, and people were being buried under the stones crashing from the cornices of century-old structures. With their hands over their heads as in Biblical times, people were fleeing wherever horror drove them or chance swept them. Pastukhov had also fled.

But his appearance was anything but that of a fugitive. He retained his habit of dressing well. To be sure he had not bought anything new in the past two years, but his clothes had only assumed

that slightly worn look that makes them seem "alive," so to speak, especially on people who know how to wear them. In fact, he appeared even more well dressed than ever, and a practised eye could not fail to recognize him as a citizen of Petrograd. His habit of observing life under any circumstances gave to his independent carriage an added haughtiness which, however, he controlled to such a degree that it was not always noticeable. He walked among men at once their student and their judge, sometimes as naive as a street-corner loungee, sometimes as self-important as the ambassador of a second-rate power. At the same time, it was always easy for him to be polite and considerate, and he was gifted with a natural joy of life. Even now, overwhelmed as he was by his circumstances and the uncertainty of the future, he retained the appearance of a person quite satisfied with life.

As soon as he arrived in Saratov he set about looking up the actor, Tsvetukhin, who had become his friend during his last visit to his native town. Later in Petrograd he had not exactly forgotten Tsvetukhin—he had simply shifted him from the category of actual friends to that of remembered friends. Just as students are brought together by their school and then separated by life, so Pastukhov and Tsvetukhin had been united some ten

years before by being together in the same city, and had then been separated by Pastukhov's departure; to be sure, they had also been separated by that subtle barrier, sometimes only imaginary, which rises between residents of capitals and those who have always lived in the provinces.

Tsvetukhin was as much to blame as Pastukhov that during all the years of their separation they had not once gotten in touch with each other. He was not one to write letters, rarely making exceptions to his rule even when a woman was involved. As for writing to men, he considered it idiotic—"Am I a broker's clerk, that I should go in for correspondence?" he would say, and insist that the only letters actors knew how to write were letters to their creditors. Perhaps he was slightly offended by Pastukhov's silence, and, fearing that the writer might not answer if he were the first to take up his pen, preferred not to put his pride to such a test.

Pastukhov went first of all to the municipal theatre—nowhere else would he be so likely to find out about the whereabouts of the well-known actor. But there he learned little. It seemed that of late Egor Pavlovich had not been working at the theatre, but had organized some group of his own which gave performances at the railway workers'

club, or the club of the local garrison, or some other such place. The unshaved old man with whom Pastukhov spoke at the theatre frowned and tapped his forehead as he said:

"He's a bit touched, you see."

"What do you mean, touched? Egor Pavlovich?"

"The very one—Egor Pavlovich. He up and left us, and there's no denying the qucerness in his way of thinking these days."

"Are you also an actor?"

"Not me. I'm the property man. But you can take my word for it."

Pastukhov was quite willing to take his word for it. He knew his friend to be a strange person—remembered his violin, his hobby of making inventions, his search for interesting types to portray on the stage. Never in his life would Pastukhov forget one occasion on which Tsvetukhin had set off on a search for types, for in doing so he had involved Pastukhov in a dangerous revolutionary court case from which the two of them had barely escaped with their freedom. Therefore it would no more surprise him to hear that Egor Pavlovich had behaved in some startling way characteristic of an eccentric, than it would be to hear that he had behaved as any normal, pleasant person should.

On emerging from Lipki Park, Alexander Vladimirovich went to the rambling old hotel alongside of the Conservatory of Music where Tsvetukhin had once lived. He recognized the yard in spite of the fact that the poplars lining the broken asphalt of the walks had shot up and become bushy. Just as in other days, drops of sound came falling through the open windows of the conservatory—arpeggios on the piano, the expectorations of a flute, the low grumbling of a 'cello. The tall red building with its pointed turrets like sugar cones, seemed standing on tiptoe, lifted heavenward by a medley of sound. The buildings of the hotel huddled at its feet. Pastukhov walked around the furthest one. Here too the windows were open, and the notes of a tinny piano made feeble response to the sounds dropping from the larger building.

There was no one around to prevent Pastukhov from making an inspection of the long corridor smelling of mushrooms and ammonia, and the open rooms lined with cots covered with brown blankets. At last he came to a hall where stood a fibrous artificial palm. It was from here the sounds were coming. He stood in the doorway listening to that persistent imitation of music. A young lady in a very short, narrow skirt and stylish shoes laced to the knee, was bearing down on the loud

pedal, squeezing out "A Maiden's Prayer"—a melody which shall remain throughout the ages a symbol of the hopes and aspirations of provincial life in bygone days. She was hammering at the keys with an unbending index finger held perpendicular to the keyboard.

Pastukhov coughed. The young lady turned around without taking her finger off the key. Gradually the piano calmed down.

"Is it me you wish to see?" asked the young lady.

"Forgive me for interrupting your practising."

"What?"

"I seem to have interrupted you. Will you be so kind as to tell me whether the actor Tsvetukhin lives here?"

"Actor?" repeated the young lady quickly, slipping her foot off the loud pedal so that the instrument growled like a dog. "Why, is he a delegate?"

"I don't know," answered Pastukhov. "That is quite possible."

"Most of the people here are delegates."

"Delegates to what? Perhaps Tsvetukhin actually is a delegate."

"Perhaps," agreed the young lady, crossing her legs. "All the delegates to conferences and things

put up here. This is a sort of dormitory. Students from the conservatory live in the last two rooms. But there aren't any actors among them."

"I beg your pardon, but I suppose you too are a student of the conservatory?" asked Pastukhov in a tone of such respect that no one could have suspected him of sarcasm.

"It's my playing the piano makes you think that, I guess. No, I play just for the fun of it. Did someone tell you that that actor lives in the dormitory?"

"He used to live here."

"Long ago?"

"Rather," answered Pastukhov seriously. "About eight or nine years ago."

The young woman gave a wide, toothy grin as she clasped her hands about one laced calf.

"Nine years? But that was in the last century! You must be joking. But if you're serious, you'd better ask my grandfather about your actor friend. You're probably an actor yourself, aren't you?"

Her eyes swept admiringly over his hat, suit, and shoes, scarcely taking in his face at all. She spoke eagerly and energetically.

"Do you work here?" asked Pastukhov with a smile.

"No, I'm in the 'Mirror of Life.'"

"So you're in the mirror of life, are you? And what might that be?"

"The movies next door. Don't you know? I'm an usher. Aunt Masha lets me come here to play the piano."

"Aunt Masha?"

"She's the chambermaid on this floor. There's a piano in our movie but the manager won't let us play it. Aunt Masha and I are great friends and we live together, not far from here. She just went out for dinner and asked me to sit here while she was gone."

"Most interesting," said Pastukhov. "Thank you very much."

"Aren't you really an actor?" she asked, unclasping her fingers to adjust a lock of hair which had fallen over her brow.

"I won't tell you."

"I can see for myself. Actors are always such funny people. If you aren't joking about that friend of yours living here so long ago, you can go ask the commandant in the first building. Maybe he knows."

Pastukhov thanked her once again, pleased by the playfulness of her glance which was brimming with feminine eagerness; he smiled, was rewarded with a laugh, and went out. Once in the yard he again heard the piano, just as insistent, but now

in quicker tempo, and he laughed to himself as he pictured that perpendicular finger striking the keys.

Yet in the person of this amusing amateur musician he recognized something novel and so completely self-satisfied that it was not she who seemed a curiosity to him, but he himself, with his last-century aspirations. Last century! The adjective stunned him as applied to a time so recent that he was accustomed to looking upon it as the present. But it had gone, never to return. Was not he himself the last century? A broken bit of the cornice of some shattered edifice? A frozen phrase of a forgotten tune; a lost chord from some provincial "Maiden's Prayer"?

"What nonsense!" he said to himself with an impatient gesture.

But scarcely had he told himself that this was nonsense, than the time which he had considered yesterday receded so far into the distance that he was frightened. Everything about him seemed changed, and as unlike what it had been as the plan of a city differs from the city itself. The plan remained the same; the houses all stood in their proper places, with the same shapes, and even the same paint, but everything had assumed a new expression and seemed to have taken on a new meaning. In this environment, changed beyond recognition, he alone appeared to have remained the

same. And he wandered through the strange city searching for his past, for his century.

"I am old," he said, slowly issuing onto a new street and gazing about him dumbly. "And I'm the only one who is."

He needed to find some denial of this admission that he was old in order to restore his former spiritual equilibrium, and suddenly from among the passers-by his eyes picked out a remarkable figure.

It was that of an old man with a colourless bald pate encircled by a half-moon of blue-white hair beginning at his massive ears. His rounded beard and white eyebrows, large as moustaches, gave him the appearance of an icon, and his searching glance might have belonged to either a martyr or an avenger. From his shoulders hung the remnants of a pongee coat of a sort which had already disappeared from summer wardrobes, the pockets of which reached almost to his knees and bulged with the various papers and packages stuffed into them. In his hand he held a panama hat, darkened with age to the colour of dried pumpkin. When he reached Pastukhov, the old man screwed up his face until his cheeks became deeply corrugated and his smile revealed a conglomeration of green-yellow teeth that looked like a mouthful of pistachio skins.

"When did you come back to your native haunts, Alexander Vladimirovich?" he exclaimed, opening his arms to embrace him. "Welcome home! Don't you recognize me?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm afraid I don't," said Pastukhov, blinking.

"Of course not! The young grow old, the old get older. But I'm the one that pulled you out of that mess you got into with the gendarmes for your connection with the underground movement. Remember?"

"Ah, yes, yes, just a second, just a second..." said Pastukhov, striving hard to remember but certain that he never would.

"Come on, come on," urged the old man.

"Yes, there actually was something like that..."

"Indeed there was! Think hard! That time the secret police made you sign a promise not to leave the city—remember?"

"Of course I do," said Pastukhov in some surprise.

"And you planned to go to Astapovo, to be present at the deathbed of Leo Tolstoy, eh?"

"Yes, yes—dear me, let me think..."

"Well, come on, come on..."

"I don't understand. I simply can't place you, simply can't..."

"Tsk, tsk, tsk! Alexander Vladimirovich! Who was it pleaded your case before the Public Prosecutor, eh? Who was it saved you for art and for all of us, eh? Think hard!"

"Of course, of course..." said Pastukhov in torture.

"Mertsalov! Mertsalov! Remember?" cried the old man convinced that the mere pronunciation of this name was sufficient to bring happiness to all and every.

"Ah, Mertsalov!" repeated Pastukhov in some bewilderment.

"Of course, Mertsalov, former editor of the former newspaper, *Listok*."

"Yes indeed, naturally, how do you do, how do you do!" exclaimed Pastukhov, wiping his brow in relief.

They wrung each other's hands and shook each other's arms, and the loaded pockets of the old man bumped against his knees, and he kept putting on and taking off his panama hat while Pastukhov kept looking at him and saying to himself with all the force of his reviving self-satisfaction: how nice to be young, to be young, to be young, and not to wear pongee coats and not to stuff newspapers into your pockets and to have a mouthful of good, sound teeth... how nice, how nice!

"How nice!" he said, taking the old man by the arm and turning him back in the direction he himself had intended going. "How nice that I met you! How are you getting along, eh?"

"How does anyone get along these days? Working and waiting."

"I hope they haven't done you any harm because of your *Listok*?" asked Pastukhov in an off-hand way.

"Why should they? You see I never was one of your liberals. I dreamed of the revolution from the time I was a little shaver. Everybody knows that. During the very worst days I was connected with the underground movement. How many people I saved like I saved you!"

"Really?"

"I should say so! How do you think I knew that you too were working for the revolution?"

"Really?" repeated Pastukhov with a guarded smile.

"Naturally! We understand each other all right! You staking your fame and your future; me risking my life! Got myself into all sorts of situations. That time with you, now—I swore you weren't mixed up in that business, and all the while I knew everything! You not mixed up in it, ha-ha!"

Mertsalov shook his head as though condescendingly patting himself on the back for what he

should actually reprove. Pastukhov gave him a penetrating glance.

"I was unaware that you had helped me so," he said quickly. "Please accept my thanks, even if it is somewhat belated."

He held out his hand to the old man.

"Oh don't mention it. That was a matter of honour, a sacred duty. One can't remember all the good things one does in life! I had to put in a good word for Tsvetukhin too that time. He wasn't without sin either, you see—ha-ha!"

"It's a good thing you happened to mention him. Where is he? I haven't been able to find him."

"Tsvetukhin? Why he's here, right here! Collecting talent from among the simple folk. Made up his own troupe. Dreams of organizing a travelling theatre. Interesting character. Quarrels with everybody. Temperamental! Imagines that he can move mountains!"

"You don't say! That sounds like him all right! But where can I find him?"

"Simplest thing in the world. I'm in with all the theatre people, you see. Writing about theatre. Naturally they don't give me much space in the papers—I'm a person of individual ideas, so to speak, though if you get down to brass tacks you'll find I am genuinely social-minded. But at least they respect me. I can't complain. They've entrusted

me with the art column, you see—that's it, the art column. So I'm writing. Not much as yet, but just you wait, just you wait!"

"But how can I get in touch with Tsvetukhin?" insisted Pastukhov (he had observed that the old man had a weakness for the cliché of all chatter-boxes—"you see"—as though everyone he met were expected to know whatever concerned him, Mertsalov).

"I'll make enquiries as to just where our Egor Pavlovich happens to be hanging out at the present and let him know about you. He'll get in touch with you. Be very glad to, very. You see we put great store in people from the home town. Where are you staying?"

"Not far from here—with one of my acquaintances—a man named Dorogomilov. Ever heard of him?"

"You don't mean to say you're living with Dorogo—"

The old man nearly collapsed in astonishment, and had to hold on to Pastukhov for support. He pulled his sculptured brows together, causing his bald pate to slide down onto his undulating brow like liquid wax. But immediately he exchanged his surprise for an attitude of good-natured banter which in its turn surprised the wary Alexander Vladimirovich.

"I just made his acquaintance. What sort of a person is he?"

"Why everybody knows him—one of the old residents. A queer bird. Seen plenty of vicissitudes."

"A mystic?" asked Pastukhov, without knowing why.

"I don't think so. More of a dreamer, a lover of riddles, a Utopian."

"And a bookkeeper!?"

"Strange as it may seem! Been looking after the accounts of the Administration from time immemorial. But he is, so to speak, a dweller in two worlds. An innocent mystifier. Not a mystic, as you seem to think, but a mystifier," said Mertsalov, smacking his lips over the word he had found. "Do you mean to say you never noticed him in the old days? He's a person you couldn't help noticing—always surrounded by little boys."

"Ah, yes! How do you explain that?"

"That's his weakness. The boys make a little god of him. In general, it's a whole story. Some of the legends about him may be unfounded, but as a whole they give a very good picture..."

They entered Lipki, and Pastukhov willingly accepted Mertsalov's suggestion that they sit down while the latter told him what he knew about Arseni Romanovich. It turned out that Mertsalov was

not a mere windbag, but a most amusing storyteller.

The story of Dorogomilov known in the city went back to the days when Arseni Romanovich was still a student of the Kazan University. One summer he had gone duck hunting in the environs of Khvalynsk, and there had met a party of hunters who took him to Khvalynsk itself. In this dull, quiet town they went on a spree, which drew them into closer friendship. Finally they rode off to the near-by estate of Baron Medem, where a fatal meeting took place. The Medems had a ward, a charming girl whose imagination had not been sullied by city extravagances. Dorogomilov lost his head as only a young man can lose his head on fine August evenings while strolling through lovely expanses of parks, fields, and gardens. Being rewarded with the tenderest response from her side, he left for home on wings of rapture. But the Medems had their own plans in respect to their ward. They gave her in marriage to a Moscow grenadier, a poor relative of theirs. Dorogomilov was crushed by the blow. He left the university and succumbed to a prolonged illness. At that time he lived with his godfather, an owner of steamboats on the Kama. That was during the years when unheard-of fortunes were made in steamboats on the Volga and its tributaries, but while some owners became fan-

tastically rich, others became bankrupt. Dorogomilov's benefactor lost everything he had, and the young man, so recently a student, not yet fully recovered from his nervous breakdown, went to share the poverty of his relatives in Saratov. He was unsuccessful at everything to which he turned his hand. No thought of marriage ever entered his head. He was of that order of people capable of keeping an oath, and fate led him to take the oath never to get married. In two years' time he got wind of the fact that the grenadier had abandoned his wife, and that she was dying of consumption. In despair Dorogomilov rushed to Moscow and actually found his beloved at the point of death. She already had a child. Dorogomilov gave her his word to take care of the child, whom he brought back with him. Now he had not only himself to think of, and he accepted the first offer that came his way—a position at the Municipal Administration. Never had he dreamed that he would spend his life adding up columns of figures, but the child had to be looked after, and for this it was necessary to pay the salary of a nursemaid. Dorogomilov displayed such endeavour that soon he became indispensable to the Administration. But while working to the best of his ability in order to make his position secure, Arseni Romanovich gave his heart wholly to the boy, becoming more attached to him

with every day. He adopted him and made his education his life's purpose, finding in this his own happiness and assuming that the happiness of the child was assured for all time. But another fate awaited both of them. One fine day Arseni Romanovich went rowing on the Volga with a friend of his, a schoolteacher named Izvekov. In mid-stream they were overtaken by a violent storm which made it impossible for them to reach either the mainland or the islands. The boat became swamped and capsized. Izvekov was the first to reach the boy, but he was unable to approach him from behind, and in his panic the boy clutched his rescuer around the neck and they both went to the bottom. This happened, like most accidents, almost instantaneously, before the very eyes of Dorogomilov. The latter clung to the overturned boat which was washed up on the sands. In a week's time the body of Izvekov was found on the island, but no trace of the boy was ever found.

This blow did not leave Dorogomilov unscathed: he landed in a psychiatric hospital. Like all inmates of lunatic asylums in those days, he was treated simply enough--baths, drops to soothe the nerves, and--nothing at all. He was released in a state of the blackest melancholy. But suddenly he discovered a new calling. His twelve-year-old son had been a charming child, and had left several

friends of his own age who showed Arseni Romanovich the most touching solicitude. They began to visit him, spending whole days with him, so that gradually his grief began to melt in the warmth of their childish love. At first he set himself the task of weaning his friends away from the Volga. He himself was afraid to approach its banks and avoided turning his gaze to where the river sparkled and shone in the sunlight. But perhaps there is no more certain means of losing the friendship of children than to oppose their yearning for the water. However interesting the walks Arseni Romanovich took with them into the hills or the forest or to outlying villages, however exciting the excursions they made to the excavations of the ancient Tatar settlement of Uvek, or to a tobacco factory, or to the iron foundry at Chirikhina, the boys kept turning longing eyes towards the Volga, so that Dorogomilov was faced with the ultimatum of either losing the children's devotion or overcoming his fear of the water. The passage of time, as well as the boys' love of the river, enabled him to do this, and then began steamboat rides and visits to the fishermen's camps which shifted along the islands and riverbank in accordance with the shifting of sterlet, carp, and bream. Often a whole flock of children with Arseni Romanovich at the head like a mother hen, would scatter over the river-

bank with their fishing rods; when they had caught a mess of bream and blue-enameled bleak they would build a campfire and make the chowder known only to those who from childhood have experienced the bliss of sitting and dreaming at the other end of a fishline. All these joys were brought to an end by the advent of cold weather, and then Dorogomilov's library became the dominant factor in the lives of the boys. He collected books more for his little friends than for himself, and in teaching them to love books, he made them frequenters of his cozy little bachelor corner. He was undoubtedly a born teacher, but he based all his relations with the children on personal friendship. To many this seemed strange, and people looked at him askance until they became used to him, as they do to the village idiot. Boys who were unable to win his friendship gave him the nickname of "Shaggy Locks" and openly made fun of him, especially as he grew older and developed queer mannerisms. Like knights of old, the boys held tournaments to decide who was to be first in the favour of Arseni Romanovich, or simply to defend his honour against those who insulted it. For Dorogomilov, the romantic world of childhood's fancy, friendship, quarrels and devotion, a world expressed in the boys' bold glances, in their flaring imagination, insatiable curiosity and naive trustfulness of

a sort to be found only among wild animals as yet unintimidated by the hunter—for him this world became a narcotic, and as time went on he became more and more addicted. The children grew up and went away, but in their place came others who, in their turn, left younger comrades as their successors, handing on to them the habits and traditions making up the Dorogomilov cult. Rarely did he receive more than four or five of his little friends at a time, and the relationship in no way resembled that between teacher and pupils. It was a free relationship, like that among grownups, and while the boys considered that they visited Arseni Romanovich in order to while away their time, actually they brought away with them more than they did from school.

To be sure, Dorogomilov never forgot his ill-fated meeting at that Khvalynsk estate, nor his adopted son, whom he had been unable to safeguard. But he never mentioned them to anyone, just as he remained silent about the drowning of his friend Izvekov. He created the impression of one who was always completely absorbed in his duties, always rushing to tend to some urgent business, so that his flying coattails became a familiar sight in Saratov. But while the townspeople became used to him, no one admitted that he was as simple as he seemed. Everyone found something inexplic-

able in his face and behaviour, as is always the case when a person is known to have once been in an insane asylum.

"A fascinating story," said Pastukhov with a smile of satisfaction when the account was over. "And who was that Izvekov? The name sounds familiar."

Mertsalov began to rock back and forth gloatingly, purring through his nose:

"Hm-m-m-m-m. It seems to me that name should mean very much to you, Alexander Vladimirovich, very much indeed." The wrinkles shirred all over his face. "You and Izvekov were involved in the same case that time, though he was just a lad then, don't you remember?"

"Really?" asked Pastukhov, uncomprehending.

"And that Izvekov who was your comrade-in-arms is the son of the drowned teacher. At present he is no more nor less than the Secretary of the local Soviet. Hm-m-m-m!"

"You don't say," answered Pastukhov, as though pondering what Mertsalov had just told him, but actually thinking of something else. "Funny—as soon as my wife made the acquaintance of Dorogomilov she saw in him a guardian angel. What do you think of that?"

"One of the seven angels guarding the city, eh?" laughed Mertsalov. "Perhaps. But it's doubt-

ful that even angels can guard the city now. I mean to say, it's doubtful they can save it from the convulsions the planet is going through."

"Convulsions of the planet..." repeated Pastukhov.

They looked at each other, smiled, and began to take their leave. Pastukhov reminded Mertsalov that he wanted to find Tsvetukhin, Mertsalov promising to help.

As Pastukhov approached his house, engrossed in thoughts of Dorogomilov inspired by Mertsalov's story, as well as in recalling the traits of character of the storyteller himself, he suddenly noticed that the porch door was open. He saw no one outside, not even the little boys who usually played near by.

He ran up the steps. The door to the apartment was also open and from the other end of the corridor came the sound of angry voices.

"Oh, but you mustn't do that, not that, begging your pardon!" cried Dorogomilov in a high voice that sounded less threatening than entreating.

Pastukhov entered his own room. He immediately caught sight of Asya, and her look—the misty, hurt look which Alexander Vladimirovich knew so well, and which expressed neither grief nor offence, but only weak submissiveness—this look informed him that the noise in the corridor concerned not

only the shouting Dorogomilov, but even, and perhaps primarily, his own family. As he stepped in, he said not what he was thinking, but what came involuntarily to his lips:

"What has happened to Alyosha?"

Asya shook her head and smiled with the pride of a mother who has been flattered by her husband's concern for their child. She went over to him. He kissed her soft fingers, and only then did he notice Alyosha.

The child was standing pressed up close to the stove with his arms folded like a grownup, watching his father with expectant concern. Olga Adamovna was sitting in the doorway of the smaller room, holding on to the jamb as though it were a rifle and she a sentry who was determined to turn to stone sooner than leave her post.

"It's a good thing you've come," said Asya.

"What's happened?"

"They're putting us out," she answered simply and with quiet amusement, as though her husband's continued pressing of her fingers was a pleasure which more than compensated for any unpleasantness she might be experiencing.

"Only us?"

"Oh no. Us, and our patron, and all his junk—in a word—the whole crew overboard!" she laughed, changing her tone to add in a very practical,

impressive way: "You must go out there and put in a word. Arseni Romanovich has lost his temper, and I am afraid is only making things worse. A very charming young soldier appeared and was a bit abrupt. Go out and take him down a peg or two. Hear the battle raging?"

Alexander Vladimirovich sauntered out into the corridor.

Not even the piles of trunks and furniture could deaden the hubbub. Everyone must have been talking at once to form the cacophony of this quarrel. There were threats and gibes and arguments and oaths and epithets.

"For the tenth time I tell you that the Housing Department has nothing to do with it! The house is being taken over by the Military Administration! The military power!"

"Taken over, taken over!" shrieked Dorogomilov in a voice that cracked and whistled. "No one is allowed to take over the property of the Housing Department without its consent, so take that!"

"If the Military Administration needs it, it will take it over. There's a war on in case you don't know it, and you can just take that!"

"Oh no, I shan't take it at all! You're doing the Military Administration a poor service by placing them in the position of lawbreakers!"

"I'm not doing anybody any services! I'm doing my duty! And you better hush up about that law-breaking. I'll be given a legal document for this apartment!"

"The document has to come from the Housing Department!"

"A perfectly legal document!"

"No document is legal that doesn't come from the Housing Department!"

"Don't let that worry you!"

"How do you like that? They take the roof from over my head, tell me I can swallow my books and property if I can't find anything else to do with them—yes, yes, your very words!—and then tell me not to let it worry me! Can you imagine. . . ."

Pastukhov was standing at the window, and however he squinted, he could not make out who it was pacing the corridor, stopping and turning around to parry the sallies of Arseni Romanovich. Suddenly two figures moved simultaneously into the light. The first was a soldier in a smart uniform, and a cap pulled down over his forehead with a ruby star in front and a visor the size of the back of a book. Keeping step with him was a man who came up only to his shoulder. The latter had his lips tightly compressed and was wearing clothes that were half military, half civilian, consisting of

army breeches, a striped suit coat and a cap with white binding, like those worn by Volga boatswains. Pastukhov was blocking the doorway, so the soldier stopped and clicked his heels together, indicating that it would be necessary for him to step aside.

At that moment Dorogomilov pushed forward and held out his hands with a cry of despair:

"Alexander Vladimirovich!"

He was wearing nothing but a vest over his ancient shirt with stiffly starched cuffs that rasped harshly against his wrists. His hair streamed down over his temples and mingled with his beard, from beneath which protruded the ends of an untied dotted necktie.

"Alexander Vladimirovich! A thousand pardons, a thousand pardons, but just listen to this! This comrade came, took a look at my apartment, and announced that it was to be taken over by the military authorities. Fine! Wonderful! The military authorities need quarters! But you and your family? Your little Alyosha? And me and my library? And the Housing Department of the Soviet to whom this whole house belongs? That doesn't interest this citizen from the military in the least! He is interested only in war!"

"I beg your pardon," said the man who was interested only in war, thrusting his thumbs into his belt, and half closing his eyes as though mustering

his patience, and calling upon them to heed the dictates of reason. Alexander Vladimirovich took advantage of the moment to nod and pronounce his name with the weighty significance he reserved for occasions when he wished to create an impression. The soldier snapped his heels together and jerked his hand up to his imposing visor in a very particular sort of salute: with fingers stiff as a board, he snapped his hand up to his temple and then slid it back, as though smoothing out recalcitrant locks.

"Zubinsky fulfilling orders—sent by the city military authorities," he said in a rather pleasing voice that in no way resembled the one in which he had been quarrelling. "Allow me to explain. The Military Administration intends moving one of its offices into the upper floor of this house. Citizen Dorogomilov has no cause to become so excited..."

"No cause!" cried Arseni Romanovich with a rasping of cuffs.

"No cause at all, because according to the law he will be given another room, possibly downstairs in this very house."

"A room! Thank you very much! And what about my library?"

"So far as the library is concerned, I personally assume that if it is of any value..."

"Who is to estimate its value? You? You?" shouted Dorogomilov beside himself.

"If it is of any value," continued Zubinsky, stressing his own composure, "it will be turned over for public usage, whereas if it is of no value..."

"No value!" mimicked Arseni Romanovich.

"Whereas if it is of no value, it will of course remain the property of its owner."

"And what about a room for the books? Don't I need a room for them?" demanded its owner.

"If there turns out to be no room for them, they will be turned over to the Old Goods Department."

Dorogomilov sank against the wall and murmured weakly:

"Do you hear that, Alexander Vladimirovich? Do you hear?"

"Yes," answered Pastukhov, giving Zubinsky a wry smile. "I'm afraid you're going a little too far there."

"I am answering your questions. That is my personal opinion, nothing more."

"And what is your opinion as to me and my family?"

"Citizen Dorogomilov demands that we show him a document from the Housing Department, but how could he have allowed you to move into his apartment without any document whatsoever, citizen Pastukhov?"

No one said a word. Zubinsky politely observed the effect of his speech: Alexander Vladimirovich stood blinking uncomfortably, Dorogomilov set to smoothing back his rumpled hair, while the man with the compressed lips steadfastly remained silent. Finally Zubinsky turned to Anastasia Germanovna, who was silently watching the scene from inside the room.

"In other words, you intend to simply throw citizen Pastukhov and his family out on the street?" she suddenly asked in a gentle tone and with a smile that might have been interpreted as charming or challenging, so that Zubinsky wavered and answered evasively:

"Oh, it's not probable that with a name like yours you'll be left out on the street."

"That was said very chivalrously," replied Asya with the same smile, "but I think we would prefer a decent room in the hotel to chivalry, wouldn't we, Sasha?"

"I should prefer just being left alone," answered Pastukhov sullenly.

Zubinsky shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say that he quite understood how unpleasant all this was, but he was merely carrying out his duty.

"I hope that you, on your side, will help citizen Pastukhov," said Zubinsky to the man with

him, who, after a minute's pause, pronounced with the effort of one suffering from a splitting headache:

"We'll make arrangements."

"I beg your pardon, but who might you be?" enquired Asya sympathetically.

"Representative from the Housing Department," replied the silent man with some bitterness.

"So that's who you are!" flared up Arseni Romanovich. "You mean to say that the Housing Department is aware of this business? And you didn't say a word? I shall go with you this very minute and turn in a complaint! Officially! An official complaint!"

Without glancing at anyone, the representative of the Housing Department went waddling off to the stairway. Zubinsky gave Anastasia Germanovna one of his exceptional salutes, showing by the incline of his body that it was intended to a lesser degree for Pastukhov, and to a minimum degree for Dorogomilov, and quickly went away, clattering smartly down the wooden steps.

Arseni Romanovich crossed his arms to hide his informal attire and made a low bow to Anastasia Germanovna:

"I must ask you to forgive my appearance" (another rasping of cuffs) "and those terrible shrieks! Terrible! Terrible! Like a fishmonger!"

He turned and swiftly disappeared into the darkness of the corridor.

When he was alone with his wife, Pastukhov walked over to the window and stood tapping with his nails on the glass. Suddenly he remembered the amateur musician in the dormitory and began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Asya.

"There are people so completely self-satisfied that if you should ask such a person if he played the piano, he would answer without blinking an eye: I don't know; I've never tried, but I suppose so."

"Do you think Zubinsky is such a person?"

"Yes."

"Well, then it's all up with us!" she said merrily. They turned to each other and began to laugh as though nothing unpleasant had happened and they were anticipating the most delightful time ahead.

Then Alyosha stepped out of his corner and took up his stand between his parents and Olga Adamovna, making sure that he could retreat to any one of the three if the need arose.

"Daddy, if they throw us out, let's go live in the garden instead of the street. And let's have Arseni Romanovich live with us too, shall we?"

Alexander Vladimirovich stopped laughing and narrowed his eyes with the thoughtful air he usually assumed with his son as he replied:

"Yes, that's what we'll do. You and I will find it very convenient living out there in the garden—playing with mother and Olga Adamovna—at who can spit the furthest."

* 11 *

On the next day as they were passing the shops still called by the old name of Bishop's Row, Pastukhov and his wife stopped to read a newspaper which had just been posted on a brick wall and was already framed with a struggling rim of flies where the glue had not dried.

The news from the front was alarming: fighting was becoming more intense and spreading to the south and the east. The Lower and Middle Volga continued to be the heart's desire of the White generals, and the simultaneous break-through of Denikin's right flank issuing from the Don steppes and Kolchak's centre from beyond the Volga, would mean the joining of the forces of counterrevolution, which had evidently chosen this moment for a decisive blow. The Cossacks of the Urals and Orenburg steppes were to bring together the ends of the deadly chain flung around the republic of Soviets. In this battle of enormous strategic proportions, Saratov represented the handle of a sword thrust southward along the Volga, with one blade turned

to the west against Denikin's army and the other to the east, against the Cossacks. It was the immediate purpose of the Whiteguards to knock the hilt out of the rebellious hand of the revolution and break the tried and trusty sword of the Bolsheviks. For the accomplishment of this purpose they had determined to stop at nothing.

Approaching summer fanned Saratov with scorching winds from three directions: from the lower reaches of the Volga, where now, as throughout the previous year, Tsaritsyn was the name on everybody's lips; from the wheat fields of the Don, where a new front had suddenly sprung up like a malignant tumour; and from beyond the Volga, where out on the steppes the Cossacks were sieging Uralsk, their largest city, now in the hands of the revolutionaries. The increasing velocity of these winds made breathing difficult, and the city sensed that the summer would be a fierce one.

Everyone knew that both the immediate and distant future depended on the daily course and final outcome of the civil war. But while understanding this and either resisting or submitting to the demands of the war, each was inevitably bound to the life of all, based not on the war, but on the future peace. In addition to this, each went on living his own personal life which was not always in harmony with the common life. All of this was

woven together into a general pattern which was sometimes dull, sometimes colourful, but always so unexpected that one hour could not foretell what the next would bring.

Dusty workers' detachments marched along the roads with wooden practice-targets over their shoulders. Trucks loaded with cots raced from one hospital to another; trucks loaded with furniture raced from one office to another. Boys and girls in trade schools modelled horses and roosters from pink and green clay and held exhibitions of their art. Factories and workshops soddered together hand grenades and stuffed them with explosives. In the late twilight, groups of music lovers would form a horseshoe around the open-air platform across from Lipki Park to listen to the symphony orchestra which was rather the worse for war, and follow the writhings of its lean conductor, one of Saratov's personages—a musician as straight-haired as Liszt and as blue-black as Paganini. From time to time a cordon of Red Army men would encircle the Upper Bazaar while it was combed for deserters. The local newspaper published an imposing article about a production of "Faust and the City" which a Petrograd troupe was bringing to Saratov. Conferences of rural Soviets and poor peasants were held. Leo Tolstoy's "Father Sergius" was shown on the screen. People stood in bread lines

in front of the bakeries. The City Soviet issued an order to remove private trade signs from all buildings. The church bells loudly summoned the people to vespers. Opposite the former town hall a cement monument, whose forms were still unrecognizable, was being raised to the revolution.

On reading the news from the front, Asya and Alexander Vladimirovich exchanged glances which needed no explanation. But on turning back to the newspaper, Asya gave a little exclamation:

"Look!"

Together they strained forward to read the glue-darkened page, their heads touching.

"Arrival of A. Pastukhov. The playwright Alexander Pastukhov, whose plays have often won the worthy applause of theatre lovers, recently arrived in Saratov. His name should be familiar not only to admirers of the theatre, but also to those who move in revolutionary circles. At one time A. Pastukhov helped spread illegal leaflets in our town, as a result of which he was severely persecuted by the tsarist secret police. Progressive people associated with the local press took measures in his defence, but to no avail: the dark powers of the past could not forgive this author of growing popularity, his sympathy for the oppressed masses and his self-sacrificing services to the cause of the rev-

olution. Now that the working class has cleared the way for the free development of the people's talent, it is to be expected that the facile pen of our fellow townsman, A. Pastukhov, will produce the works that the contemporary public has every right to expect of him. Theatregoers wish him the greatest success in this noble field of endeavour.

U.M."

The Pastukhofs moved away from the paper and turned the corner. Asya took her husband's arm. She saw his face without looking at it. He had pulled his head down into his coat collar so that he developed a double chin, the lower half of his face puffed up, and he pouted so that his lips became like ripe pea pods. He was looking off into the distance, now blinking as though he had something in his eye, now staring motionless through half-closed lids.

There came a sudden peal from the belfry of the Bishop's church, which was answered by the liquid chimes of the new cathedral: the Right Reverend Father rode through the gates in a carriage drawn by a pair of heavy, slow-gaited bays. The Pastukhofs stood aside to make way for the carriage, and through the glass door they got a glimpse of its inmate: his head in its black cowl was slightly thrown back and his hands, white and

puffy as hot muffins, stood out against the lavender silk of his sleeves as he made the sign of the cross to right and left.

Asya quickly crossed herself.

"Phooh! A priest has crossed our path!" blurted out Pastukhov with the obvious intention of showing that he was in the best of spirits.

"He's not a priest, Sasha! He's a monk!"

"Is a monk good luck?"

"Unquestionably!"

"Well, that's different," he laughed, wiping his face with his hand. "U.M. Mertsalov, the idiot! Humph! He's done me a good turn all right!"

"You never mentioned all that to me," said Asya with relief. "Leaflets, revolutionaries, the underground. What was it all about?"

"Nonsense! Don't you know—have you forgotten—that old joke about my signing a promise not to leave the city? It's true of course that they held me here at that time and tried to accuse me of something or other. But it was all nonsense, sheer imagination!"

He fidgeted, nervously unbuttoning his coat and letting it fly about him.

"At least, a great exaggeration," he suddenly added. "That rusty progressive leader seems to be going in for home cooking. Watery soup made out of provincial gossip."

"But what actually did happen?"

"Oh, what could have happened? A trifling incident..."

He straightened his shoulders and began to whistle, and she realized that he had not yet quite made up his mind what attitude to assume toward the virtues pressed upon him.

"Well what? What if it was a trifle," she purred softly and lovingly. "It's not for poor people like us to go declining trifles, once they come our way. It's not our fault, not our doing..."

He shuddered, and she responded with one of her soft, merry, and most convincing little laughs.

"But I can't allow it," he said sharply. "It's beneath my dignity."

She gently pressed his arm above the elbow; he frowned and said not another word the rest of the way home.

As soon as the Pastukhovs had moved in, Arseni Romanovich had insisted that Alexander Vladimirovich use his study and library, for he realized how difficult it would be for the writer to work in the same room occupied by his family. Pastukhov accepted Dorogomilov's offer. Before taking his place at the latter's desk, he cleaned it up, although he felt that in doing so he was violating fundamental principles of the old bachelor. But he could not stand having dust and superfluous ob-

jects in front of him. Longingly he thought of his own desk—the crystal lamp with its pale violet shade, the massive crystal inkstand, the papier-mâché pencil holder decorated with a Chinese dragon, the stack of sharpened pencils.... Asya took charge of the pencils: he broke them and she sharpened them, and she also saw that there were always flowers next to the inkstand. The flowers changed according to the season: in the spring—tulips or a bunch of narcissus; in the winter—a sprig of flaming hothouse azalea; in the summer—gillyflowers, or simple daisies, or two or three spikes of pink lupine. A whimsical sequence of scents passed through the study of Alexander Vladimirovich, and he searched for secrets in their delicate nuances. More than once he amazed his wife with his discoveries.

“Asya!” he once called in a voice which set the whole apartment ringing. “Come here! Close your eyes and smell this. Don’t you find that there are mushrooms hidden beneath the blessed innocence of these lilies?”

“Really?” she cried, happy and unbelieving. “It’s the truth! And they say lilies don’t smell! How is it I never noticed it before? Goodness, the veriest mushrooms! Fried mushrooms!”

“Not fried ones, you silly! Fresh ones, just picked from a rotting stump! The pinkish ones,

with brown edges that grow in clusters on tiny legs. Get out of here now! You don't understand a thing! You've got a cold, or cotton up your nose and you're interfering with my work!"

Dorogomilov's study smelled of the mice that nibbled at the books in broad daylight, somewhere between the wall and the back of the shelves. But the books smelled of books, an odour that is not to be confused with any other. Especially books of the eighteenth century, the yellow or blue-grey ones with the scarcely discernible watermarks showing when the pages are held up to the light—the "New Plutarchs" and "Encyclopedias of Superstitions" and "Laughing Democritus" which have been transplanted from country estates to the city by impoverished nobles or by sons of the clergy escaping from the country parishes of their fathers. The books of later years which have passed through the hands of booksellers and collectors, contain within their bindings a whole bouquet of ferments and alburnum, reminding one of wine barrels and peeled willow wands—the typical odour of absorbent wood pulp, now more and more frequently being added to paper. The old-fashioned paper, made only of rags, smells somewhat like a dressmaking establishment, or a linen closet being aired. But these similes are the merest approximations, for a book smells like a book, as wine smells like

wine and coal like coal. It has won a place for itself among the basic elements; it is not a compound, but a pure element.

Pastukhov placed his watch alongside of the inkwell: he was used to working a great deal, but always by the clock. As he sat studying the delicate gold second hand, he felt that he was unable to concentrate his thoughts on a single theme. In Dorogomilov's study his ideas wandered like a winged seedling, blown hither and thither by the winds of spring. He got up and went over to the bookshelves, pulling out the first volume that came to hand, like an organ-grinder's parrot drawing fortunes out of a hat.

Usually he took his books from among the histories. What he had formerly considered of interest only to university grinds and researchers, dull facts entombed in cardboard folders and textbooks, now assumed vital significance, and moved Pastukhov like his own fate. The thunder which for two years had been rolling above the roofs offering Alexander Vladimirovich doubtful refuge, echoed the remote events recorded in these half-forgotten pages. Perhaps the past only seemed to die along with the outdated chronicles, actually living on in the veins of the people to fan old flames as soon as new fires burst forth—fires of vengeance and the eternal longing for a better lot.

Pastukhov read about the people's war led by Pugachov, who rose before him like a ghost haunting the bare yellow hills encircling Saratov. The former *khорundzhi* stood bareheaded, his fists on his hips, the August heat stirring his thick brown mane as he turned a calm, stern gaze upon the townsmen below, who with bated breath were climbing up to lay the keys of the city at the conqueror's feet. On a raven horse—himself like a raven, winged and dark—the silver feather of a Cossack sword swinging at his side, his crimson shirt open at the throat, he rode through the Tsaritsyn gates of the city, while the townspeople threw their hats into the air and ran after his horse, beseeching aid against their enemies and oppressors. At sunset, to the chiming of cathedral bells, he sat on a dais covered with Persian rugs confiscated from the rich, and accepted the townspeople's oath of allegiance, while his brave champions wreaked vengeance by stringing up nobles and tsarist officers and hostile merchants on gallows ranged about the public square, where the wind from the steppes, heavy with wormwood, swung the bodies and then turned to race headlong back to the spars beyond the Volga.

This same wind carried Pastukhov away from the Pugachov lands, over the yellow hills, across the Volga and the steppes a hundred and fifty

versts and a good hundred and fifty years to our own day.

Now he heard the galloping of a white horse, heard the whistling of the wind through its nostrils, saw a fair-moustached rider stretched low over its mane, his fur cap pushed back, brows knitted, eyes narrowed, while behind him came cavalry regiments in wave after wave like the grass on the steppes. This rider was the erstwhile carpenter from Balakov only recently a simple soldier, now commander of cavalry and infantry troops which he had rallied on the vast plains beyond the Volga for the sake of defending the revolution against the Urals Cossacks. Under the banner of the Bolsheviks he scourged his enemies, Red Commander Vasili Chapayev, scourged and chastised them with the heavy hand of the people. The oriental sibilants of his name—Chapai, Chapayev—had been carried on the wind before him along the Urals, along the whole Volga. Like a born ruler of the steppes he conquered steppeland towns and cities and gave them new names—an imperious godfather—after which he galloped on and on, over the endless expanses from the Uzen River to the Urals, from the Irgiz to the Belaya. Enflamed by that same worm-wood-ridden heat of August, he took back his native city of Nikolayevsk. He called his regiment the Pugachov Regiment, and during their attacks against

the Czech artillery defending Nikolayevsk he renamed the city Pugachov, cancelling the old name, on the authority of the new workers' and peasants' government, and as his cavalry rushed into attack, the men set the plain ringing with cries of "Pugachov! Pugachov! Surrender Pugachov!"

This battle had taken place some nine months before the spring in which Pastukhov sat pondering over Pugachov and Chapayev, comparing Pugachov's free Cossacks with Chapayev's red-bannered fighters. At the present moment Chapayev had moved far beyond Pugachov, and was now battering and breaking the officers' corps led by Kappel. Other towns had become the battleground of his horsemen, Volga towns whose names sounded a new music resembling the beating of drums: Buzuluk, Buguruslan, Bugulma, Belebei.

But however the music changed, however events rushed ahead, Pastukhov was ever conscious of that irresistible odour of wormwood emanating from the flat expanses of southeastern Russia, uniting them in time and mood. He imagined that it was there in the southeast, where the wormwood called, that the fate of the peoples had been decided through the centuries. It was there that the durability of the Russian spear had been tested, the strength of the sword had been measured, the whistling of the

bullets had been echoed by the whistling of the Cossacks. From the Battle of Kulikovo to Stepan Razin, from Pugachov to the time when Cossack hands roamed the lower reaches of the Volga, the history of the people's glory, the people's sorrow, the people's wrath had been cleaved with a clashing of arms on that stretch of steppeland where the great brother and sister streams drew together only to separate again. And only a few months before, on those same bittersweet expanses, near the key-city to the Lower Volga, still bearing the royal name of Tsaritsyn, the first of the great strategic battles for bread, freedom, and Soviet power had been fought and won. And this very spring war clouds were lowering above that part of the steppe where the brother reached out his hand to the sister: The Cossack Don was thrashing his steel sword; mother Volga was lining up her cannon on the hills.

Pastukhov was startled out of his reverie by a light knock at the door. Arseni Romanovich glanced into the room with a look that showed his remorse at being guilty of such brash intrusion. No, no, he wouldn't interrupt, he had come for just a second and then he would leave to prepare his dinner of fish soup. To be sure, there was a bit of news he had wanted to communicate, but that could wait.

"Come in, come in! Do come in. After all, it's your apartment, and you make me feel very uncomfortable. I'm not busy. Just sitting here leafing through Solovyov. Has the news anything to do with our being put out?"

Oh, no it had nothing to do with their being put out. The complaint filed by Arseni Romanovich had not yet come up for consideration, but the military authorities were not taking any further action.

"So far everything's fine, everything's fine," said Dorogomilov cheerfully. "But there's something I wanted to show you."

He pulled a newspaper out of his side pocket and opened it up.

"About you," he said impressively.

"Oh yes," said Pastukhov quickly. "I've read it."

"You have? So have I, and I am very, very glad."

"Glad?"

"You yourself are too modest ever to let us know that you serve the people as well as Melpomene."

"Well, you see . . ." protested Pastukhov, declining the undeserved honour.

"I kept wondering what case you could have been connected with, and according to the date it must have been the Ragozin case, am I right?"

"To a certain extent, if you wish to have it that way," said Pastukhov reluctantly, going over to the window. "But let's forget about it."

"I understand! I understand very well!" exclaimed Arseni Romanovich, taking an impulsive step forward, then retreating in shy indecision. "This article represents, as it were, a blow to your modesty. Begging your pardon, let me assure you that I understand only too well that a person can't come out with a public announcement, so to speak, as though he wanted everyone to know he had sacrificed himself for the cause of the people and rendered service to the revolution. And he might even find it unpleasant if someone else came out with such an announcement—behold him, as it were, a sort of historical personage! Well, and in general, anything of that kind. If ever I had done anything in the past to help the movement, I too would find it impossible to say a word about it."

"But why, if you actually had done something?" said Pastukhov decisively.

"Oh dear no! Just imagine!" exclaimed Arseni Romanovich with a frightened gesture. "No indeed! But my excitement is due to the fact that as soon as I read this article I involuntarily wondered whether you too—that is, whether you had indeed taken part in the Ragozin affair. And then I had

the idea . . . that is, I put myself in your place, so to speak, and decided that you would probably be interested in knowing just how it all happened at that time."

"How what happened?"

"Of course, of course! You probably were much more closely connected with the affair—oh, indeed I am sure that you were so closely connected that you know everything, down to the slightest detail."

"Everything about what?"

Dorogomilov twisted his fingers and wrung his hands as he pressed them to his breast; a flush covered his faded cheeks above the grey fringe of his whiskers and he strained up on his toes as though trying to get a look at something. Pastukhov studied him with the eagerness he usually experienced when confronted by something he could not understand.

"I thought that once you had taken part in that affair, it was only right that I, as your acquaintance, should tell you what I alone knew."

"By all means, Arseni Romanych. Do tell me, quickly."

"But dear me, you mustn't get the idea—I shall even ask you to give me your word that you will not think I am claiming to have figured in this in any way—or that I want to create the impression that I too am some sort of a revolutionary or to

put myself on the same level with you, Alexander Vladimirovich! Dear me, no! I simply couldn't let anyone—"

"Arseni Romanych!"

"Very well then, very well."

Dorogomilov untwisted his fingers, placed the newspaper neatly on the table, ran his fingernail along the fold, and, when he had regained his equanimity, began to speak softly:

"You probably will be interested in knowing that Pyotr Petrovich Ragozin did not even leave Saratov when the secret police were carrying on their search for him in 1910, and that he was to be found all that time—"

Here Arseni Romanovich took a deep breath and pointed a trembling finger at a narrow side door.

"—in there."

"Here, in your apartment?"

"In this very library."

"In other words, you—" began Pastukhov, but Dorogomilov did not let him finish.

"I beg you not to misunderstand me. I do not wish to say a word about myself—only about Pyotr Petrovich. He hid in my house not because I took any part in his affair, as, let us say, you did. On the contrary, it was just because I had no connection, none whatever, with the cause. When the

underground Party Committee learned that mass arrests were to be made, one of my old acquaintances who was a member of the Committee came to me and said it was necessary to hide somebody, and that my apartment would be a very suitable place for this, since everyone looked upon me..." Arseni Romanovich gave a smile that was both sly and naive, then sighed and said frankly: "Why make any bones about it?—everyone looked upon me as the town simpleton. Of course he didn't put it quite so bluntly, but I understood and agreed—no sense in denying it because, actually that's how it is. Well, then that good man put in his appearance and I hid him in there..."

Dorogomilov ran over to the little room where his library was kept, made a sweeping gesture toward the shelves, then fell back to the old divan with its torn leather upholstery, and clutched the back with both hands as he finished impressively:

"I installed Pyotr Petrovich on this very divan, there, behind the bookshelves."

Arseni Romanovich tossed back his hair and adjusted his coat with a certain pompousness as he waited for Pastukhov's reaction.

Alexander Vladimirovich went into the library and stood before the shelves for a minute, then returned to the divan and sat down. He ran his hand over the polished surface of the back, took

out his cigarette case, and began to roll a cigarette between his fingers, preparatory to lighting it.

"Did he spend much time behind those shelves?"

"Twenty-seven days," answered Dorogomilov quickly.

"Without coming out?"

"Without coming out."

"But how could he?..."

"I supplied him with everything he needed."

"But how did he spend his time in there for a whole month?"

"He read."

"Read?"

"Yes. Here, begging your pardon—what is that book you're reading? Solovyov? He read that too. Many of the books still have his remarks in the margins."

Dorogomilov took up one of the books on the table and began to list through the pages.

"Here, for example—"

Pastukhov saw an almost indecipherable remark written in a bold hand across some lines which he quickly read. They were from a charter issued by Pugachov in which by his imperial grace he granted to his followers "...the land and fields, seas and forests, money and provisions, lead and gunpowder and eternal freedom..."

"Can you make out what is written there?"

"Yes," said Dorogomilov, and read: "Thus it shall be!'"

"Did Ragozin write that?"

"Yes, that is in the hand of Pyotr Petrovich."

Pastukhov got up in a cloud of cigarette smoke and remained standing motionless while Arseni Romanovich waited in respectful silence.

"Hm. Successors, it seems."

"In what respect?" asked Dorogomilov, not comprehending.

"Before you came in I was reading about Pugachov and thinking about what was happening today beyond the Volga, along the Don, and throughout the whole of Russia. The gunpowder which was set then is exploding today. It is the great-grandsons of those free Cossacks who are now charging over the steppes."

"Yes and no," Dorogomilov hastened to put in. "It is true that the vengeance of the people which was then put down by force, and which since then has often asserted itself only to be stifled, is now holding sway. But the present aim is not only vengeance and punishment, isn't that true? The present aim is the building of a new form of society, don't you agree?"

"But you yourself have seen that Ragozin attached his own signature to the promises of Pugachov. What about that?"

"To Pugachov's dream, to his noble aspirations! Not to his support of the free Cossack bands! He attached his signature to the future implied in Pugachov's promises, not to the past."

"But does it not seem to you, my dear Arseni Romanovich, that in the violence of their vengeance, in the tumult of their passions, the people are only deepening the roots of a past they are trying to uproot?"

"Not at all, Alexander Vladimirovich, not at all, I tell you, because they are planting the new at the same time that they are uprooting the old!"

"I should like to think as you do! But won't this flood of vengeance wash away the delicate young offshoots which are scarcely discernible in the present whirlpool?"

"Delicate? Do you call them delicate? Why the very flood itself has sprung from one of these young offshoots—the great idea of a state founded on the whole people. It is this new state that is directing the course of the all-destructive flood. And you call it a delicate young offshoot!"

"But in the hoofbeats of the cavalry and the shrieks of the riders here in these remote parts, do you not hear the roar of the blind elements?"

"Only to the extent that the roar of the elements is to be heard behind anything so vast. And

this shrieking and beating of hoofs is characteristic not only of remote parts. I hear something else. An immortal word has been spoken: all power to labour! And this word will unite all regions, even the most remote, into one great whole."

"Which will be indivisible?"

"Unquestionably."

"But they speak of such things on the Don also, Arseni Romanovich..."

Pastukhov seemed to be teasing him, amused by the earnestness with which he voiced his convictions. But this amusement did not prevent his becoming warmed by the fire of faith burning in the breast of this tousled, grey-headed old man, and the writer felt that this argument would lead them to a consideration of the problem which was most vital to him and which absorbed him more and more with every day, namely, his own place in the events which were taking place.

"On the Don!" exclaimed Dorogomilov indignantly, turning away as though to show that he could not imagine drawing such a comparison. "There they speak about the indivisibility of the Russia of the past. But here the people are wiping out that past so completely that..."

Dorogomilov grabbed Pastukhov by the lapels and proclaimed in solemn exaltation, stressing every word with a tug:

"...that the people will be compelled to take their future into their own hands; they will have no choice but to create a better world—as they sing in their anthem! And their feat will be magnificent!"

He immediately became ashamed of his outburst and jumped back as soon as he had uttered the word "magnificent."

But the old man's ideas astounded Pastukhov. The finality with which he had pronounced the word "compelled" seemed to reveal to him for the first time the true inevitability and foreordination of the new world, as if nothing were left for it to do but make its appearance. And the fact that it had been spoken by an old man who, far from expressing fear or distrust of the future, was filled with the ecstasy of youth, added prophetic force to the word which, like any other force, had its effect, rousing in Pastukhov the desire to submit to it. But he was accustomed to resisting every new idea, and he immediately realized the absurdity of his desire. It would indeed be ridiculous if he should fall on the neck of that queer bird in his shapeless coat and suddenly hail him as the most convincing of the many prophets, who had tried to convert Pastukhov. He waited until the impulse to merge his feelings with those of Arseni Romanovich had subsided before he said:

"Are you convinced that reason will conquer passions before passions determine the course of events?"

"Reason has no intention of conquering passions. That would be fatal. It will only guide them."

"By the compass of the Ragozins?"

"Do you not trust it? It is your compass too, if you have not allowed it to drop out of your hands since the time when you and Ragozin both held it."

Dorogomilov's agitation suddenly abated, and he turned a cold, hard gaze on Pastukhov, as though he were testing the latter's endurance. There no longer remained a trace of deference in his voice, nor the fear he had formerly shown that he might wound Pastukhov's pride. He was now only a stern examiner, and it was with the harshness of an examiner toward one who is evading a direct answer that he now said to Pastukhov:

"But perhaps during recent years you have abandoned the views of Ragozin, Alexander Vladimirovich, and now belong to another party?"

In spite of the commonplaceness of talk about political parties, this question seemed exceptional to Pastukhov, and for a second annoyed and even insulted him. He resented the authoritative way in which Dorogomilov was pinning him down. Furthermore, Pastukhov was hereby placed in the position

of one who was being observed, instead of doing the observing, and this greatly lowered him in his own estimation. But it would have been cowardly to take offence, and he resorted to his usual gesture of wiping his face when under trying circumstances. He blinked and gave a short laugh.

"My dear Arseni Romanovich," he said, "never in my life have I belonged to any party, and I have no intention of joining. Some day I shall tell you all about what happened to me during that Ragozin affair. But now you must tell me the rest of the story about how Ragozin hid here in your house."

"Ah, yes," said Dorogomilov quickly, once more regaining his fussy amiability. "It is most interesting that at that time I had no idea who it was I was hiding."

"You don't say!"

"I realized that if I asked who he was, I would not even be refused an answer, but simply be told some invented name. So I never even considered asking. It was only a year later that I learned who that good man had been. And you can't imagine how the news frightened me—even though a whole year had passed!"

Arseni Romanovich smiled happily.

"Frightened? After a whole year had passed?" laughed Pastukhov.

"A whole year! His name, you see, had caused a great deal of commotion in the city. Don't you remember?"

"Well, how did it all end?"

"Very simply. On the night of his twenty-seventh day in my house, I led him down to the riverbank to a rowboat we had made ready, and he set off downstream all by himself to the village of Rybushki where, as he told me, he was to take the steamer. I suppose that is what happened. I never asked him whether he intended taking a steamer going north or south, but we had agreed that he would simply abandon the rowboat. I never saw him after that night until the revolution, when he returned here and I heard him speak at a meeting."

"Is he here now?" exclaimed Pastukhov.

"Why, didn't you know?" answered Dorogomilov, equally surprised.

"And you haven't gotten in touch with him?"

"No."

"But listen—" said Alexander Vladimirovich, flinging out his arms. "Why in the world have you ever gone through all this trouble and worry and applied to some Housing Department or other to prevent being evicted from your own apartment when you could simply have gone to Ragozin and been assigned a palace with music and honours!"

"But why should I?" asked Dorogomilov, cocking his head.

"What do you mean why, you funny duck. Didn't you save his life?"

Dorogomilov stood all huddled together as though seized by a sudden chill, as he replied with a hurt air:

"I would die of shame before I would ever do such a thing."

At that moment a woman's voice was heard in the corridor, followed by a resonant, richly modulated man's voice. The sounds kept coming closer, and Pastukhov, who was feeling uncomfortable in the presence of the injured Arseni Romanovich, was delighted by the unexpected relief. He listened a second and suddenly recognized the man's voice.

"Tsvetukhin! Tsvetukhin has come!" he cried as he rushed to the door.

* 12 *

When Egor Pavlovich shaved off his moustache, it was discovered that he had a slightly turned-up nose and a protruding lower lip which seemed to give final impress to the ends of his words. It was possible that he had once grown a moustache in order to hide this defect, and it was

equally possible that he had now shaved it off in order to soften the marks of time.

But in spite of that unexpected lip and the wrinkles, Pastukhov immediately recognized the former Tsvetukhin—once theological student, builder of air castles, darling of the public, vaunter of a swarthy handsomeness. For a second Pastukhov was deeply moved. As they embraced, each of them was conscious of being overwhelmed by a wave of that youthfulness which had made them so kindred in the past.

But Egor Pavlovich immediately assumed the playful, even mocking tone to which people of independent spirit resort when wishing to show that they can stand up for themselves if their sense of equality is threatened by another's superiority. This attitude represents a painful barrier preventing even some of the most cultivated people of the provinces from maintaining a simple relationship with so-called "city birds"; the fear of having their pride nipped often keeps such people from perceiving their own superiority to such "birds."

Had this first meeting taken place when the two friends were alone, it might have been entirely different. As it was, Tsvetukhin was being studied by both Anastasia Germanovna, who met him with a cordiality that might almost have been called ar-

tistic, and by the overwrought Dorogomilov, whom Tsvetukhin knew to be one of his devoted admirers. Furthermore, the meeting was accompanied by an amusing circumstance which led Pastukhov to be playful, thus giving a false twist to the whole thing right from the start. .

Tsvetukhin had brought a girl with him whom he introduced simply as "Annochka, one of my students." She turned out to be an acquaintance of Dorogomilov, yet at the first moment she was as shy as though she had found herself heaven knows where, and immediately retired into the shadow of one of the bookshelves with a look of gentle pleading, as though she were begging them to forget about her presence. From that vantage point she carried on observations, studying Pastukhov with particular attention.

"Well, how's the old revolutionary?" was almost the first thing Tsvetukhin said after the greetings were over. "Come here to fight?"

He rubbed his hands with zest, as much as to say: "Glad to take you on!"

"It's you who seem to be doing the fighting," said Pastukhov with a short laugh. "Hear you're about to blow up the theatre."

"We're just turning things inside out, like the tailor with our stage costumes. Making brocade out of sacking. But I see you've been climbing to

the very heaven! No reaching you! You're the one, it seems, who made the revolution—persecuted by the tsarist secret police and all that!”

Tsvetukhin narrowed one eye roguishly, scarcely enough to be taken for a wink.

“What had I to do with it?” said Pastukhov, but there was something awkward in his banter. “It was all your Mertsalov.”

“Our Mertsalov or your Mertsalov—Mertsalov or somebody else—the fact remains that the whole city now knows about the revolutionary activities of Alexander Pastukhov!”

“Is there anything wrong with that?” asked Anastasia Germanovna with enchanting concern.

“Of course not!” cried Tsvetukhin, quickly dropping his voice to a whisper and placing his finger to his lips. “That’s ve-ry, ve-ry good! Wonderful! And just between ourselves, let me say that it is extremely timely!”

He laughed out loud and once more narrowed one eye.

“You got a twitch?” asked Pastukhov.

Tsvetukhin felt his face and became greatly worried.

“A twitch? Why a twitch? Have you noticed anything? That’s dreadful! Annochka, have I got a twitch?”

“One eye twitches,” said Pastukhov.

"Oh, my eye!" laughed Tsvetukhin. "That's because it's dazzled by the sight of this battle-worn revolutionary!"

"All right, all right! At least we trod the noble path together, you and I."

"You sure?" asked Tsvetukhin with quiet earnestness.

"Less sure of that than I am of the fact that you used to tremble at the very thought of a gendarme."

A faraway look came into Tsvetukhin's eyes.

"It's a good thing you aren't entirely sure," he remarked absently, then, after a short pause: "Could you admit the possibility of my having done that in order to hide my participation in a conspiracy?"

"Trembling in order to hide your participation in a conspiracy?"

"Exactly. To hide my participation in a conspiracy."

"Hide it from whom?"

"From you."

They looked at each other in silence for a moment, Pastukhov blinking uncomprehendingly, Tsvetukhin assuming an air of profound mystery.

Suddenly Egor Pavlovich burst out laughing and threw himself on Pastukhov, embracing him and slapping him on the back and shouting through his laughter:

"Bit all right—hook, line and sinker!"

Everyone felt better, and Pastukhov muttered as he freed himself from his friend's embrace:

"The hell with you, you despicable comedian!"

"You just wait! We'll be returning to that biography of yours! But at present I have two questions to ask: first, do you imbibe?"

"Have you got anything?" asked Pastukhov distrustfully.

Tsvetukhin lifted the edge of his coat to show a bulging hip pocket.

"What of it?" growled Pastukhov.

Tsvetukhin slowly held a bottle filled with a brown liquid up to the light.

"What of it?" repeated Pastukhov, unimpressed.

Tsvetukhin glanced about the room for the icon and not finding it, faced the window to cross himself.

"Can't convince me," insisted Pastukhov. "What is the stuff, poison?"

Tsvetukhin frowned and shook his head.

"I'm asking you what it is, comedian!"

"Home-brew!" said Tsvetukhin in a stagey whisper, lifting his brows as high as they would go.

"Impossible!" said Alexander Vladimirovich, as though stunned. "Inconceivable! Inexplicable!"

Contrary to all logic! I'll kill you on the spot if you're lying, Egor!"

"Confirm my claim, Annochka!" said Tsvetukhin appealingly.

"Can there be the slightest shade of truth in what this lunatic is saying?" said Alexander Vladimirovich severely, turning to Annochka. "Can it be that the contents of this miserable bottle contain even the most infinitesimal amount of intoxication?"

"Unfortunately they do," smiled Annochka from her corner.

Pastukhov took the bottle from Egor Pavlovich, and after holding it up to the light and studying the cloudy liquid for a minute, suddenly shouted:

"Asya! Serve up the jellied pork!"

"Heavens, what a lot of noise!" answered Asya, feigning fright, and at the same time smiling at Annochka, whom she accepted as a natural ally.

"Dried fish!" cried Dorogomilov unexpectedly in his high voice. "I've got some dried *vobla*, straight from Astrakhan!"

This was the first word he had spoken since the arrival of the guests. At first he had been silent because he could not make out whether the friends were quarrelling or joking; later because he was enthralled by the runs and trills of Tsvetukhin's improvisations. Formerly Egor Pavlovich had

played on his most personal emotions. A great gulf had separated him from the actor's performance: Tsvetukhin had acted, Dorogomilov had watched. But now there was no gulf. The performance had entered Dorogomilov's own house and challenged him to cease being a spectator and join in the acting. It was preposterous! As though Arseni Romanovich had landed on the stage and was playing alongside of Tsvetukhin!

As soon as Arseni Romanovich had cried out about the fish, he was overcome with embarrassment, for everyone turned to him, expecting him to follow up his words with some action. He felt bound to do something. Pastukhov stared at his dishevelled locks in as much surprise as though he had suddenly found them coming to life on the head of a wax figure in the window of a barber-shop. Dorogomilov froze on the spot. Alexander Vladimirovich moved over to him, touched him lightly on the elbow, and said in a slightly nasal, voluptuous voice:

"Give them a whacking, friend—give them a hell of a whacking, there on the corner of the stove. Whack the very gizzards out of them until the juice starts running, then skin them and peel the meat off in shreds—little thin shreds from the tip of the tail to the back of the head. That's the way to do it!"

Tsvetukhin narrowed his eyes.

"In little ribbons, little ribbons," went on Pastukhov, wallowing in the succulence of his description.

"Aha, I sense a kindred spirit, a true Volga man! How well I understand you!" exclaimed Dorogomilov, and immediately everyone began moving about, eager to begin the party.

But with a single gesture Egor Pavlovich stopped them. Gliding noiselessly over to Annochka, he took the hand which she held back and pulled her into the centre of the room.

"Before drinking a toast to our reunion, we must solve a technical problem which brooks no delay," he said solemnly. "A fatal accident has clipped the wings of this young creature..."

"Don't, Egor Pavlovich! I beg you not to!" protested Annochka. Her face flushed crimson and she kept hanging back, struggling to free her hand. "I'm quite comfortable."

"Don't mind him," encouraged Anastasia Germanovna, adding with a woman's understanding: "Your heel has come off, hasn't it?"

"The poor child is walking on nails!" cried Egor Pavlovich impulsively. "And there's no denying it—the fault is all mine. When we were crossing the car tracks, Annochka's heel got caught

in the rails—bang!—and there she was! I rushed to her aid, found a stone, and began to hammer away. The result was that a nail the size of a spear came sticking up through the sole. Horrible. There was nothing I could do about it! How we ever got here I don't know!"

"You poor thing, how *did* you ever manage?" asked Pastukhov sarcastically.

"How did we manage?" repeated Egor Pavlovich, missing the point, but feeling a barb somewhere. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no special reason. Only I can't figure out whether it was poor Annochka who had the nail in her shoe or you?"

"Of course it was Annochka, but my heart is not made of stone."

"O dear no!" agreed Pastukhov.

"Take off your shoe," said Anastasia Germanovna with such affectionate understanding that she might have been giving advice on some highly confidential matter.

Egor Pavlovich offered Annochka a chair. She sat down. He lightly dropped down on one knee to help remove the shoe, but she quickly jumped up and ran limping back to her corner, tossing off the shoe and standing with one foot drawn up like a stork. All her embarrassment seemed to have left, and she watched the fuss Egor Pavlovich had

stirred up on her account with undisguised amusement.

Dorogomilov began searching in the fantastic chaos of his household for the necessary implements. With a bang and a clatter he raked through the drawers of his desk, raising clouds of dust, sneezing and coughing and muttering imprecations at the little boys who were constantly thwarting his love of order. Finally he found a little pair of pliers, a nickel anvil and some sugar tongs. But the hammer refused to be found.

With a mocking smile Alexander Vladimirovich watched Tsvetukhin. Egor Pavlovich was running from one place to another, now clutching Annochka's slipper to his breast, now feeling the nail and glancing inside with a look of despair. Pastukhov seemed to have already solved the riddle presented by his two guests, and was thoroughly enjoying the situation. When the hammer was at last unearthed, Tsvetukhin snatched it out of the hands of Arseni Romanovich and Pastukhov said:

"Begging your pardon, mademoiselle, which of these three knights would you prefer having as your cobbler?"

Annochka looked attentively at Alexander Vladimirovich from where she was standing with one fashionably stockinged leg still tucked up under her short skirt.

"My name is Anna, or Annochka," she said, "and I shall be very grateful to anyone who can nail the heel on securely."

It seemed to Pastukhov that this was an entirely different girl from the one who had entered and hidden in the corner like a little wild creature. He was particularly surprised by her voice, which sounded a stern feminine note.

"Don't worry, Annochka, I'll have it fixed in a jiffy," said Egor Pavlovich, bending over the shoe on the window sill. "You have probably forgotten, Alexander, but Annochka and I were just recalling how you once called her a siren. She was a little girl then with enormous eyes and pig-tails. Remember?"

"Yes, it seems to me..." said Pastukhov slowly, once more observing Tsvetukhin's struggle with the nail.

While the shoe was being mended, Anastasia Germanovna busied herself about the table and Arseni Romanovich could be heard conscientiously carrying out the culinary instructions of Pastukhov: from the summer kitchen came the sound of the whacking of the *vobla* against the iron top of the stove, echoing Tsvetukhin's uneven hammering.

When preparations were completed, the people began to seat themselves about the table, a task

complicated by the protruding drawers of the desk. But at last the men found themselves lined up on one side, with Annochka and Anastasia Germanovna opposite them.

Three wine glasses were filled (the women laughingly but firmly declined the home-brew), and Egor Pavlovich had just reached out for his glass and opened his mouth to make the first toast when Pastukhov interrupted.

"Just a minute," he said. "I'm not sure just what this concoction is. Maybe it's roach poison. Not for nothing has the fair sex declined it. But I wish to announce the treat I have prepared for our dear guests. The dazzling dish you now see before you is commonly referred to as meat jelly à la boyar."

"We call it pigs' knuckles," put in Tsvetukhin.

"You may call it whatever you like; I'm telling you what this dish is called in the taverns from whence its fame sprang. True meat jelly is not made of pigs' knuckles or calves' knuckles or anything else of that sort. True meat jelly is made only of cows' knuckles. And only the knuckles, mind you. Unless you add a bit of the cud. And the dish should be of a consistency to support a spoon upright even before the mass has cooled. Nor during the preparation should it be allowed to boil excessively, but be subjected to a pro-

longed, meditative simmering, for which reason the top of the stove is categorically forbidden and a Russian oven required."

"Help!" groaned Egor Pavlovich, writhing with impatience.

"When the jelly has cooled it should be as springy as rubber, and as transparent as the fabulous *alatyr*, (amber, in case you don't know it) and the fat which gathers at the edges should give off the faint aroma of singed hoof. On such a dish dined the boyars in ancient Rūs, and therefrom springs the epithet—meat jelly à la boyar. I myself went to market and selected the cows' knuckles with my own hands. There is a grande dame in our household, one Olga Adamovna, who, with frequent appeals to God and the devil, did the singeing under my personal supervision. Asya went to a neighbour where, thanks to the respect in which our honourable Arseni Romanovich is held, she was allowed to build a fire in the stove and shove the iron pot about with a poker. In the cellar of another neighbour's house the pots containing the dish were cooled. From this complicated process finally emerged the miracle which now rests on your respective plates. In view of all this, I propose the first toast to Asya."

He raised his glass to his lips, but started back.

"What is it?" he asked, gazing at those about him in horror.

"Aha!" gloated Tsvetukhin. "You just wait! Don't think I'll let myself be outdone by you and your pigs' knuckles! This—" (here he tapped the bottle with his finger) "is a product of the people and by the people! To be sure, there is a variety which surpasses it, but that is the aviation variety. With the shortage of gasoline these days, our Nieuports are flying on undiluted alcohol, as a result of which it is now possible for their pilots to soar to unscaled heights. In civilian life we cannot hope to outdo them. What you now see before you is—a sylvan legend. It was born at the bottom of a gulley in the depths of the forest, brewed in a clay oven approximately the size of a Russian stove. Every fire lighting such an oven is a sacrificial flame to an unknown god. A faint smoke curls through the lacey foliage of the trees, and then, as during the first thaws of March, the liquid begins to fall, drop by drop, from the distilling tube into a pail—a warm liquid quietly murmuring the sylvan legend. The first bottle of this legend is called *pervach*. If the wine is made of watermelon instead of rye, it is called *nardyak*. If it is..."

"Very poetic," observed Pastukhov, "but frightfully boring."

Egor Pavlovich cast an anxious glance at Annochka. She looked unhappy and was listening to the oratorical contest without the slightest interest.

"Wait a minute," said Tsvetukhin, picking up courage.

"Don't bother," objected Pastukhov. "Not even a meistersinger could convince me that it is possible to drink this yellow stuff belched from the belly of a serpent. The doctors would surely forbid it."

"Doctors are dolts!" said Egor Pavlovich, beating the air with his hands. "If any doctor ever proclaimed the truth that wine is beneficial to the health—a truth as old as Methuselah—he would be crowned with laurel leaves in the public square, the children would dance about him like a Christmas tree, and he would be granted an honorarium before he ever had time to wear out his university pants. But you can trust my intuition that the doctors are coming to that! They'll yet be writing prescriptions for a reasonable use of the cups. And they will become rich! And famous! And they will close up their medicine chests forever as being superfluous."

"Amen," said Pastukhov.

He leaned toward Egor Pavlovich, winked at Asya, raised his glass and added mischievously:

"To the golden slipper!"

He kept a twinkling eye on Annochka as he held his nose and drained the glass.

"You're a wonderful preacher, Egor," he then grunted, making a dreadful face.

"It apparently doesn't require much eloquence to convince you," said Anastasia Germanovna tenderly.

"You see into the very depths of my soul, Asya," he answered refilling his glass.

Slow as the party had been in getting under way before the first drink, it now picked up and was soon going at full speed.

"Listen, Egor," said Alexander Vladimirovich when the bottle was half empty, "where did you ever get hold of this marvellous cherry brandy?"

"It's not so simple to get hold of. But I have two bosom friends who are always ready to help me out in a pinch. Remember Mefody Silych—a school chum of mine—also a worshipper of the muse? You don't? Humph, you people from Petrograd! Bad memories you have!"

"Drop it. First of all, I remember everything down to the slightest detail. And secondly, why should you go setting yourself above people from St. Petersburg? You might think this was the hub of the universe!"

"Correction: the ~~half~~ of the Russian universe. But you're a St. Petersburg Russian, one of those about whom Dostoevsky said that they didn't take breakfast, they took *Frühstück*."

"Do you call this a *Frühstück*?" asked Alexander Vladimirovich in a hurt tone. "Singed cows' knuckles? Your soda water made of burnt cork soaked in machine oil? Help yourself and see how you like it!"

"Thanks. With the greatest pleasure. And it's not the *Frühstück* that's making you angry, but the fact that you've forgotten Mefody. I suppose you've forgotten Annochka's father too—Tikhon Platonovich Parabukin, eh? That would be a real disgrace! It was because of him that you sacrificed yourself for the revolution, wasn't it?"

Pastukhov got up, pushed back his chair, walked heavily over to the window, and came back.

"Listen, Egor—I don't like your tone. ~~What~~ is it you're getting at? That I myself was the one who had that stupid article published?"

"Are you crazy?" cried Tsvetukhin, jumping up.

"No I'm not. I want to have a serious talk with you. At present there are lots of people claiming that they too did something or other, sometime or other, for the cause of the revolution. That may be petty, but I can understand it. As you put it—very timely. But what would you like to have me do?"

Break my neck to announce I never did anything for the revolution? That would be idiotic. Put yourself in my place: some fool of a Mertsalov credited me with having spread propaganda against the tsarist regime. So I go to the editor and say—what? What can I say? That my name has been slandered? That the article distorts the facts? I shall be told that the editor deeply regrets having been misinformed by his respected correspondent, but after all, what can he do about it? Publish a denial? In what vein? Say that Alexander Pastukhov never in his life opposed the tsarist regime? And what conclusion will be drawn from that? That that same Pastukhov was against the revolution. Thank you very kindly. That would hardly be timely. And why should I accuse Mertsalov of slander? He wanted to do me a good turn. Give me a break, so to say. In order to protect themselves from the onrush of circumstances thousands of people are selling their souls to create the same sort of misconception about themselves that Mertsalov invented about me. He wanted to help me make a career for myself in this new environment. Why should I punish him for it? When all is said and done, the generous fellow might actually have believed what he wrote. The fact remains that he did plead my cause before the tsarist prosecuting attorney. The secret police actually were interested in

me. They really did make me sign a promise not to leave the city. All this is true. Then it follows that if Mertsalov is guilty of anything at all, it is only of having exaggerated. But people are not taken to court for exaggerating. On the contrary, they are offered bribes to do that sort of exaggerating if circumstances permit. Therefore it seems that instead of rushing to the editor with a denial, I should sit down and write Mertsalov a letter of thanks—"allow me to express the gratitude of your grateful servant"... phoooh!"

Alexander Vladimirovich actually spat and turned to the window again, where he picked a piece of loose putty out of the frame and tossed it on the floor.

"In other words, there was never anything like that at all? No work in an underground organization, no illegal leaflets...?" asked Anastasia Germanovna with an air of disappointment.

"It's nothing but a huge joke!" he replied with a wave of his hand.

"Then treat it like a joke," she said, glancing at the others with a look of bright innocence.

"But it's only the four of you here who know that it is a joke!" cried Pastukhov, turning sharply away from the window. "The paper doesn't state it was a joke. Anyone who reads it will accept it as the truth."

"Let them," said Anastasia Germanovna even more naively, and with the same comforting gentleness. "It can't hurt you, can it?"

"You don't understand. If later it becomes known that all this was false, they will think I did it, that I'm fawning for favour, that I'm trying to make it easy for myself, that I am simply a liar! Just look how my own friends regard me. Take a glance at Arseni Romanovich. At Egor, who also suspects me of the devil only knows what!"

"I don't suspect you of anything. Apparently you've forgotten me entirely if you can accuse me of thinking such things about you," said Pastukhin bitterly.

This sudden change of tone seemed to sober everyone up. Pastukhov returned to the table and stuck a ribbon of *vobla* into his mouth, slowly turning it over on his tongue like a well-fed horse chewing a straw. After a moment's pause he suddenly laughed and said:

"What are you so quiet about, Arseni Romanovich?"

Dorogomilov shook himself and nervously stroked his beard as though preparing for an impressive speech, but only answered incoherently:

"As a matter of fact... Hm, you see... I find it rather difficult..."

He gave a little cough and apparently decided to say nothing.

"Difficult to understand me, isn't it?" asked Pastukhov.

"No, no, not in respect to that newspaper article.... In the sense that of course it does make it awkward for you that the public will be under a misconception about... hm, well, about your special services. Of course I understand that you actually rendered them... the services... only..."

He became embarrassed and tried to escape his unpleasant thoughts. Anastasia Germanovna rushed to his aid with her placating smile.

"Why is it essential that everyone render special services?" she said. "We don't demand of a civil engineer that he render services other than his engineering. Perhaps he does not have even engineering services to his credit. It is sufficient that he *is* an engineer."

"The way I see it, Alexander Vladimirovich is upset by the fact that these services have been incorrectly attributed to him," said Dorogomilov almost severely, noticeably paling as he turned to look Pastukhov direct in the eye. "As I see it, you disapprove not only of the falseness of the newspaper article, but also of the fact that you have been called a supporter of the revolution—that your name has been associated with the revolution."

For some time Alexander Vladimirovich sat blinking at Dorogomilov, as though trying to focus his eyes, but at last he turned away and looked enquiringly at his wife, saying quietly:

"See, Asya? I was right. I am threatened with general contempt."

Annochka, who had been sitting motionless, leaned her elbows on her knees and covered her face with one hand.

"Apparently it is hard even to look at a creature like me," continued Pastukhov, scarcely moving his lips. "See, the righteous younger generation cannot abide me." His glance was at Annochka.

"No, oh no!" cried Annochka, quickly straightening up. "You mustn't pay any attention to me. I was simply lost in my own thoughts..."

"In Annochka's family..." began Tsvetukhin, but she interrupted him peremptorily:

"I am sorry that Egor Pavlovich began such a strange conversation. As though he were somehow in the right. But it seems to me that Alexander Vladimirovich cannot be held responsible for this mistake. If it was a mistake. Was it a mistake, Alexander Vladimirovich?" she asked with challenging seriousness.

For a second he looked at her in silence, as though unable to believe that this slip of a girl was capable of asking such a bold question.

"Yes," he answered, with harsh conviction.

But immediately he assumed a lighter tone and nudged Egor Pavlovich as he said in a stage whisper:

"Aha! A stamp of the foot in the golden slipper!"

"Please don't think I am blaming Alexander Vladimirovich," said the embarrassed Arseni Romanovich.

"And certainly I had no thought of offending you, Alexander," put in Tsvetukhin.

"Thank goodness! You have caused them all to melt. Annochka!" said Anastasia Germanovna with a sigh of relief. "I propose a return to the primitive brew you once praised so lustily."

She took the bottle in her soft fingers with a charmingly coquettish gesture.

"Well," said Pastukhov, taking a bite of *vobla*, "it would be foolish to sulk. The same thing might easily happen to you, Egor. Wake up and find your goose cooked. Then just try and prove you weren't a revolutionary!"

"I'd never try!" cried Tsvetukhin happily.

"Why, are you a Bolshevik?" asked Pastukhov offhandedly.

"No, but I'm willing to carry out Bolshevik ideas."

"In your theatre?"

"At present I have no theatre. But I shall have. I'm very anxious to talk to you about my plans. You're the very person I want to tell them to. And I hope you'll agree to join us."

"In what?"

"I have a dramatic circle. Perhaps it would be better to call it a studio. Two or three professional actors, but mostly young students. A few of them have acted in amateur plays, but most of them have never faced the footlights. If you ever knew how splendid they were! How they long to work! And most important of all—what faith they have! We often discuss the future of the theatre. The revolutionary theatre in general, but especially our theatre. If you ever heard us!"

"I'm listening," said Pastukhov casually.

"Not to me. It's my young people you should hear."

"Children will be children. But you aren't a child. I'm interested in knowing just what it is you're after."

"In the broadest sense, of course, we are still dreaming—still only searching for what we want. But we are ready to take the first steps in the realization of our dreams. We think that first of all our theatre should be able to give performances under any circumstances at all. Our equipment must be so constructed that we can transport it from one

place to another with our own hands if we have no horse. And the actors should feel at home any place on earth."

"In heaven or earth," suggested Pastukhov.

"It will be heaven for both actors and audience. As for the audience, it will find us where it had never dreamed of finding us. In factories. In homes. In villages. Out on the fields. At the market. On public squares. At the front, if a war is on. At amusement centres in times of peace. In a word..."

Egor Pavlovich said: "In a word..." and became silent. He ran his fingers through his thick dark hair and kept his hand resting on the nape of his neck. There was a thick sprinkling of grey in his hair and Pastukhov noticed that this gave it a purplish tinge.

As soon as Egor Pavlovich began to speak of the theatre his tone lost all that prickliness which apparently made even him uncomfortable. His movements became freer, his whole body relaxed, and he seemed to grow larger. Annochka kept watching him intently, and with an exacting urgency which seemed to say: "Come, come, speak up bolder!" Dorogomilov assumed the position of one sitting in the theatre behind a very tall person: he leaned to one side and threw back his head, so that his beard stuck out like a dagger. Anastasia Ger-

manovna parted her bright lips. Everyone was absorbed in Tsvetukhin. His voice and speech seemed to have pushed Pastukhov to one side. The pause lasted for a long time.

"In a word," repeated Egor Pavlovich in his deep, enchanting voice, "our art will penetrate the lives of the audience, and the audience will merge with our art. And by becoming a part of it, the audience will, in the long run, create it."

Pastukhov gave a noiseless laugh.

"You better spare yourselves for the future. At present no one is buying tickets for your theatre. It would be better to tell me what plays you intend staging."

"We have begun with Schiller. Just wait and see our performance!"

"'Love and Intrigue' I suppose?"

"Yes."

Pastukhov glanced quickly at Annochka.

"Naturally you are playing Luise?"

She blushed and asked with childish naivete:

"How did you guess?"

"Ah, yes," he said, smiling and shaking his head. "That was difficult. Very difficult indeed."

Placing the tip of his thumb against his upper teeth, he glanced slyly at Tsvetukhin:

"But it is even more difficult to guess who is playing Ferdinand."

"You're right," said Egor Pavlovich challengingly, "I am playing Ferdinand."

"You are in your forties, if I am not mistaken. Isn't it about time to be playing old men?"

"Oh, how can you! He is a wonderful Ferdinand!" exclaimed Annochka almost angrily, after which she blushed even redder.

Ignoring her outburst, Alexander Vladimirovich said in a tone of disappointment:

"I suppose it goes without saying that you intend doing away with the stage?"

"If the situation demands it. But that is not important. For the present we shall retain both curtain and scenery."

"Listen, my friend. I can write on birchbark, or on a stone, or chalk up the top of the stove. But in none of these cases will I produce a book. However revolutionary your theatre, it cannot possibly do without a stage."

"What about ancient Greece? What about the miracle plays?"

Pastukhov ignored this outburst also. His manner of speaking had become ever more ponderous, so that it was difficult to decide whether he was gathering his thoughts in order to express something which he found of major importance, or whether he was simply becoming bored. Suddenly he muttered carelessly:

"Nothing very new about it. The idea of a mobile theatre originated in Petersburg."

"I want my theatre to be mobile not only in name."

"Want to make it a wandering theatre?"

"If necessary. At least I want to make it a popular theatre. Like in the days of Shakespeare."

"Shakespeare didn't play Schiller. Very vague, very vague, my friend."

"Every new idea is vague at first. But once you start working on it, the idea crystallizes. Then some morning you jump out of bed with everything perfectly clear in your mind."

"Humph! Crystallizes! Well, if that's how it is, of course. . . . Still the dreamer! But somehow you used to be more sober-minded."

"More restrained, not more sober-minded. Now I have found the wings I sought all my life."

"I remember your flying machines. An aviator for sure. If you had broken your neck then, no one would have suffered but yourself. But why should you seat these young innocents in your flying machine before you know its lifting power?"

Pastukhov nodded toward Annochka. She was tense as she listened, trying to control her emotion, her heavy eyelids drooping, now running her fingers

over the tablecloth, now toying with Alyosha's bone-handled fork which had been given to her as the youngest.

"No crime is more grave than seduction in art," said Pastukhov with displeasure. "Here you are drawing young men and women along in your wake, but do you know where this path leads? You describe it as something bright and alluring. But can you foresee the future of art? Have you any idea what will happen to it under the influence of your own and others' fantastic experimenting? Maybe it will bring only grief to those whom you have succeeded in making your followers. If I had my way, I would make the law on seduction apply to all those who lure young people into art, who..."

"That's no way to build the future!" interrupted Egor Pavlovich. "You can't aspire to something finer with such thoughts in your mind, do you understand?"

"Quite right, quite right!" agreed Arseni Romanovich, leaning forward as though about to get up, but on second thought retiring to his former position and silence.

Annochka glanced at Pastukhov.

"Why do you keep speaking about seduction?" she asked. "I don't know what art will become in the future, but at present it is a part of life. I am

alive. And I have freely chosen the profession to which I should like to devote myself. If I prove to be talented, I shall not have made a mistake. But no one is guaranteed against this. Last year one of my friends entered a dental school. They took her into the anatomy room to demonstrate pulling teeth on corpses. She fainted away and never entered the school again. After that she took up singing. If I faint on the stage, I shall try my luck in the anatomy room. I want to live according to my own choice. I assure you that no one is seducing me."

"That's fine," said Alexander Vladimirovich with unexpected gentleness. "But unfortunately, things are so simple only in formal logic. Have you studied it yet? Art is part of life, and life—I am free—ergo... and so forth. But in no field do people become so desperately unhappy as in the field of art. It doesn't take much to make them so. If you are ambitious and your ambition is thwarted, you become unhappy. It would be entirely superfluous to faint."

"But I shall be a success," said Annochka simply and convincingly, throwing back her head like a little child, then quickly catching herself and hanging her head as she shamefacedly patted down her curls. Everybody laughed, and even she herself gave an embarrassed smile.

"Of course you will!" exclaimed Egor Pavlovich

ecstatically. "And don't you go frightening Annochka, Alexander."

"I can see she is not one to be easily frightened. But I know the theatre too well not to tell the truth. Take envy, for instance—a consuming flame that withers the soul like consumption. . . ."

He moved over to Tsvetukhin without finishing his sentence:

"Do you know the difference between a bad actor and a good one?"

"What is it?"

"A bad actor envies success; a good one envies talent."

"That's true!" cried Tsvetukhin. "That's a criterion for you! A criterion by which you can always recognize talent! Right, Annochka? How well you put things, you amazing man!"

Egor Pavlovich impulsively took Pastukhov's head in his hands and smacked him loudly on the lips.

"You and I must surely get together! We are both seekers, and therefore we tend to exaggerate. The truth lies in the mean between extremes. I suppose I also exaggerate. Here's my hand on it—you are sure to join us!"

"In what role? Pantaloon, in red trousers?"

"No joking if you please! You are to be our first playwright."

"Which of my plays do you intend staging?"

"You'll write a new play for us."

"Ah, so that's it!"

Alexander Vladimirovich once more got up and started pacing the floor. As he lighted his cigarette and gave a condescending laugh, he began a speech which sounded as if prepared beforehand:

"Not long before we left Petrograd, a man I had never seen before managed to reach me in my study. It was no simple thing to get past my Asya, but in the long run she succumbed to his stubborn persistence. There he was, a giant of a fellow with a curly yellow beard like mimosa. He took a seat on the divan and for a full half hour filled my study with problems of the historical moment. I felt myself drowning in the flood of his rhetoric, and in desperation I squeaked that he was wasting much too much time on a moment. He missed the point and went thundering on. I held up my hands and said I was willing to do anything, anything, only I couldn't make out what he wanted. He suddenly came to and demanded that I immediately write a play popularizing a Clean-up-the-yard-and-garbage-heap campaign. It turned out that he was a pharmacist, a member of the Sanitary Education Committee which was holding a drive against epidemics."

Alexander Vladimirovich waited patiently for the laugh. But nobody laughed.

"'A beard like mimosa'—how nice!" murmured Anastasia Germanovna rapturously.

"But aren't you a little hasty in comparing me to your mimosa man?" objected Egor Pavlovich. "You haven't yet heard what I would like you to write about."

"Why not ask me what *I* would like to write about?" cried Alexander Vladimirovich angrily. "And in general, is it possible to write at present? I haven't been able to squeeze out a single line since I arrived here! Not long ago you quoted Dostoevsky. Allow me to quote Lomonosov: 'The muses are not wenches to be had for the asking!' He wrote that to his patron."

"How can you imagine that I expect you to violate your muse!" exclaimed Tsvetukhin offensively.

"When we were coming here, Egor Pavlovich told me what good friends you were," said Annochka quickly. "Why is it that you are always quarrelling?"

Once more she turned a sad and searching glance on Pastukhov.

"They'll go on quarrelling until they've had enough, and then they'll kiss and make up," smiled Anastasia Germanovna, taking Annochka's fingers in

her soft hand. "You haven't yet learned that people in our circle always quarrel when they talk about art, my dear."

Pastukhov said nothing. Of late discussions on art wearied him. He felt that he had a better understanding of art than anyone else. All the discussions on the theatre which the revolution had inspired reminded him of the debates held by amateurs as to the importance of open-air productions during summer vacations. He was bored by analyses of schools and tendencies in art. He was convinced that everything of artistic value was created in spite of artistic tendencies, and that it was more important for a school of art that you call yourself its adherent than that you actually be it. Like political parties, schools of art solicited supporters. Actually he had contempt for them all and did not wish to be hypocritical. Such was his platform. If he was drawn into an argument, he usually ended up with the announcement that he loved real emotion, real thought, live human beings in the flesh, and therefore he considered himself one of the few genuine realists. Since his plays were invariably staged, he felt that he was not mistaken. In his heart he had decided once and for all that the times were irrational, as proved by the fact that reason was being applied to things which, like the dance, defied reason. He was convinced that his own tastes and

views could never be changed, and this afforded him a proud, though bitter satisfaction.

What Tsvetukhin said might easily have been heard in Petrograd circles. There too everyone demanded the creation of something which nobody could define. Pastukhov was irritated by Tsvetukhin's naive faith in the originality of his dream. He found such idealism provincial. At the same time he saw very well what was the matter with Tsvetukhin: when a man is in love, even the moon looks novel.

He leaned back in his squeaky armchair and waited to see what turn the conversation would take. He himself was too lazy to give it any turn.

Arseni Romanovich said thoughtfully:

"That man... with the beard..." (he hesitated to say what kind of beard, and even placed his hand over his own beard, though no one could ever have accused it of resembling mimosa) "perhaps he was not very tactful, but so far as the problems of the historical moment are concerned, it would of course be a mistake not to take them into consideration..."

"I wanted to say just that, Alexander," put in Tsvetukhin. "If you—if your future play was saturated with the spirit of the historical moment, as it finds expression in the fabulous times in which we are living..."

"The historical moment!' 'Fabulous times!'" broke in Pastukhov. "What high-sounding phrases you use, Egor! That simply is not in the Russian tradition. We have always distinguished ourselves for our modesty. Where has this disease come from? History! Somewhere, at some time or other, I read about the events which took place in Paris at, it seems, the beginning of the fifteenth century. There I came across this sentence: 'The Cabochiens joined forces with the Bourguignons, but were defeated by the Armagnacs.' I couldn't get it out of my mind. Is it possible to take seriously events which, within the course of two or three centuries will boil down to: 'The Cabochiens joined forces with the Bourguignons...' etcetera, etcetera?"

"While sitting on that very divan a little while ago, you took an entirely different view of history!" said Arseni Romanovich. "Can you not perceive behind words which died heaven only knows how long ago, the suffering and triumph of human beings? It wasn't for the sake of ridicule that you read Solovyov, I take it."

Suddenly Annochka once more put in a word, this time without her naive seriousness, but with the delight of an unexpected discovery:

"Alexander Vladimirovich, it seems to me that you are saying all this not because you believe it, but for some other reason. Am I right?"

"That is—what do you mean by 'all this'?" he asked, blinking at her disapprovingly.

"Please don't be angry with me. You laughed at that pharmacist, but weren't you pleased that he should have had such faith in your art, that he should consider your words so powerful that you had only to write them and people would immediately begin to clean up their yards, and perhaps begin living a different sort of life in those yards? And as a matter of fact, just think of all the lives your play might have saved—I mean, how many people would have been kept from catching contagious diseases and dying of them. That is, if you had written the play. Isn't that true? You know yourself it is."

Her eyes became radiant, as though she were touched by the fact that it had been given her to see things so clearly and simply.

"Poor Sasha, everyone is jumping on you," laughed Anastasia Germanovna.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear young lady," he said, "do you really think that the bell can be mounted in the belfry by a line of poetry? You and I are speaking of one and the same thing, but our thoughts are different."

"Please tell us what you think about the ideas of Egor Pavlovich."

"First of all, I think there is no point in subjecting me to a cross-examination. I object not to your words, and not even to your ideas. But events have set your imaginations on fire and I object to the state in which you find yourselves."

"Because it is different from your own?" asked Tsvetukhin. "I thought you were more youthful."

"What has youth got to do with it?"

"The revolution is youth."

"Oh, cut it out! I'll have those words engraved on your tombstone. Unfortunately youth has nothing to do with art. Or perhaps that is not quite correct. Youth interferes with art."

"I can't understand that," confessed Annochka. "If youth and revolution are the same thing..." (here she faltered) "is it possible that the revolution interferes with your writing?"

"It interferes if he writes against the revolution," said Tsvetukhin sullenly. Presently he threw back his head and exclaimed, "Oh, I can't tell, I can't tell! It's as though we were walking through a garden during a storm with the trees lashing, the wind shrieking, and such tumult in our hearts that..."

"Damn it all!" burst out Pastukhov. "There he goes again! 'Tumult!' I loathe such words! Actors' words! Invented, nonexistent, alien to the language! A kind of grinning mask that has

nothing to do with the living word! How you pile it on, Egor! Whenever I hear those animated exclamation marks, it seems to me that a naked strong man is prancing before me, making an exhibition of his biceps!"

He stopped and gasped for breath, as though taking on fuel in order to talk on and on, now that the moment had come to pound a breach in the barrier before him. But suddenly he became silent.

Annochka slowly got up, her eyes fixed fearfully on the door.

Pavlik had entered and was beckoning to his sister. It was clear he had come running all the way, without stopping for breath.

She stepped over her chair like a schoolgirl and rushed to him. He pulled her down and whispered in her ear, holding his breath.

Arseni Romanovich jumped up.

"About your mother?" he asked cautiously.

Egor Pavlovich also rose. He had gone white and was looking at Annochka with frightened eyes. She began taking her leave of everybody.

"Let me see you home," said Tsvetukhin when she went over to him.

"I beg you not to."

She seized Pavlik by the shoulder and they ran out of the room, the boy calling back:

"I'll come back later, Arseni Romanych!"

Tsvetukhin at once got ready to leave. His hand shook as he extended it to Pastukhov.

"Oh, come on. Why should you leave? Stay a while. Can't you live a minute without your golden slipper?"

"Don't!" said Tsvetukhin sharply. "You can't imagine what Annochka's mother means to her!"

"She is dying," said Arseni Romanovich.

"How was I to know?" asked Pastukhov, softening.

After seeing Tsvetukhin down the hall, Alexander Vladimirovich returned to his own room.

Anastasia Germanovna opened the window. The sky was crimson in the west, but the air was still heavy. They sat down beside each other. The change had been so sudden that they sat in silence, gathering their thoughts. Presently Anastasia Germanovna placed her hand on her husband's knee.

"Do you remember the legend about Pilate?" she asked quietly. "Pontius Pilate, old and fat and flabby, was lying on the beach warming his rheumatic bones in the sun and talking to another old patrician. The life of both of them was all in the past. In the happy, glorious, distant past. 'Remember when you were still governor of Judaea?' the old man asked Pilate. 'Remember that little redheaded prophet who called himself King of the Jews? That was before the uprising, it seems. The

scribes demanded that he be killed, and you handed him over to them and they crucified him in Jerusalem. Remember? They called him Jesus.' Pilate rolled over in the sun and answered without opening his eyes: 'No, I don't remember...!'"

"Why tell me this blasphemy?" asked Pastukhov.

"It came to my mind when Tsvetukhin reproved you for having forgotten your old friends, and you were ashamed to admit that you had actually forgotten them. Why should you be expected to remember them?"

"Are you comparing me to Pilate?"

"Goodness no, darling! I was only wondering why you should be expected to remember them? What are they to you? As though there were any comparison!"

She placed her head on his breast.

"You are big. You are strong. Above everything else you must think of your calling."

After a moment's pause he said uncertainly:

"No, Asya. I'm the most ordinary of people. I'm weak. Weaker than others."

It pleased him that he should speak so frankly, and that she should have called him strong, and he knew that she would object ("No, no! You're wrong!") and would kiss him.

And she did object.

"No, you are strong!" she said, parting her lips for his kiss.

"But what I think, Asya," he said a minute later, "is that this is no place for us. We must be moving on."

"No, darling, moving on is not the word. We must run away." She spoke in a scarcely audible whisper, looking deep into his eyes with passion and despair.

* 13 *

Olga Ivanovna was dying.

The process was interminable. Now it was late at night. Annochka had thrown herself across her bed with her legs hanging over the edge and her hands under her head, which was pressed against the wall. She was staring through half-closed eyes at the ceiling. Pavlik and her father were at her mother's bedside in the next room.

Annochka heard her mother's raucous breathing coming from somewhere far away, down under the floor. It did not sound like human breathing and was especially alien to anything associated with Olga Ivanovna, her mother. The cuckoo clock on the wall struck three and went racing on with little clicks of the pendulum that resembled the crackling of freshly roasted sunflower seeds. Her ear de-

tected no other sound. She was sure that she was wide awake, and that she remained here on her bed not because of weakness or need of sleep, but because of a conscious desire not to witness her mother's suffering. But the visions which passed through her mind at that time were like short dreams, broken off by frequent awakenings. She saw her father, then unexpectedly one of her acquaintances, or even herself, but most of all she saw her mother, saw her almost without interruption, and it was through the vision of her, as through a light curtain of leaves, that everyone else was seen.

Now the little, hustling figure of Olga Ivanovna, prematurely old and grey, was scurrying down the street with a bundle of sewing under her arm which had to be delivered to a customer on time. Again she was pushing her way through the market crowd to reach a cart laden with cabbages, from which she selected one whose firm centre promised to give her her money's worth. Or she was bending over the table in the corner, cutting out some garment which she then guided with her slender hand under the whirring needle of the sewing machine. By this hustle and bustle and the tireless labour of her hands, the indefatigable little woman kept pulling her family out of the hole into which the head of the household, Tikhon Parabukin, was forever

pushing it because of his incurable addiction to alcohol. Of course it was not he, but Olga Ivanovna who was the true head of the family. She took upon herself sole responsibility for the children and for her husband, who often was more dependent on her than a helpless babe. Her one purpose was to raise Annochka and Pavlik in spite of everything, and she accomplished this purpose with a stubbornness which stemmed from a fanatic determination that they should never have to drink from the bitter cup which she had drained to the dregs. Izvekova had helped her with Annochka's education. Vera Nikandrovna had taught the child her letters, had managed to have her enter a *gymnasium*, had spoken in her behalf before the Students' Aid Society in order to secure a stipend for her, and in general was always ready with a helping hand. Once she had even presented Olga Ivanovna with a sewing machine, for which the latter blessed her morning and night. But it was the sweat of the mother's brow, rather than outside aid which kept the family going. More than once Parabukin was moved by the impulse to help his wife. At such times he would find a job and triumphantly bring home his first earnings. But soon he would be squandering more than he earned. He also loved his children, especially Annochka, but there was a sense of guilt in this love, while the love of Olga

Ivanovna was utterly self-sacrificing, never doubting for a moment that it would triumph and bear fruit in the end.

In Annochka's mind all this past found expression not in ideas, but in hazy images, and strangely enough it had become the past for her only from the moment when she had read death in her mother's round, prominent eyes. Now Annochka lay on her bed as though bound, conscious of the numbness in her hands and feet. While the dream fragments passed through her mind, she kept repeating in fright that the loss of her mother would mean not the diminishing of the family by one member, but the end of the family, the end of their home.

She seemed to detect a change in the sounds filling the room. The pendulum of the clock was swinging as briskly as ever. But there was no sound other than its ticking. With a single movement she rose on her elbow, and turned cold from the sudden flow of blood to her fingers and knees. A long-drawn gasp seemed to fill the whole world. It was followed by a prolonged silence. Then the gasp again, and again silence.

So that was—the end? Was it possible? And did it always come like that? So recently—only yesterday, when the doctor had said that her mother's situation was grave, she had nevertheless

believed that she would not die. Just this morning Olga Ivanovna had felt better, so that Annochka had convinced herself that the crisis would lead to recovery, rather than to death. After all, she had recovered from her first illness, the terrible siege of typhus which had so wasted her frail body that Annochka had carried her in her arms like a baby. But Olga Ivanovna had so far recovered that she had left her bed and been about to take up her needle again. Why, then, should she now have to die from some ridiculous complication of the lungs? No, no! This was only the crisis, the end of the crisis, the peak of the crisis. Olga Ivanovna would step over this peak, take a deep breath and...

Why did she not take a deep breath? Yes, there it was again. Those gasps, more dreadful, more unnatural than ever. Was it possible that such rattling could come from a human breast, from the poor, narrow little breast of her mother? Silence. No, another gasp. Or had she just fancied it? Was it all over? Had that been the last breath? No, no. Impossible. She would have listened differently had she known that this was the last—quite differently...

Why were there no more gasps? They would surely begin again. For the last time. Her mother had been quiet for so long now—so quiet—the rooms were waiting... There. Now it had begun;

now it had begun. But it had begun quite differently, in little jerks. What could it be?

"What is it?" asked Annochka in a trembling voice, and at that very instant she started up on hearing, instead of her mother's gasps, despairing sobs coming through the half-open door in slow crescendo. It was her father weeping, and something tapped dully against the iron frame of the bed with the shaking of his body.

"What is it?" cried Annochka.

She tried to get up, but was held down by a weight which her lithe and supple body had never known before. She remained lying there motionless.

The tousled Pavlik came running into the room, pulled a chair over to the clock, climbed up and stopped the pendulum.

"Why?" asked Annochka, sitting up on the bed.

In reply Pavlik only looked at her reproachfully with his golden, burning eyes. Apparently he could not bring himself to explain that he had once read that clocks are stopped when a member of the family dies.

It was already dawn, though objects were still scarcely discernible, when Annochka went fearfully into her mother's room.

She saw her father's heaving shoulders as he stood all bent over, tall and thin, in a black Tolstoy blouse that was too small for him, his head on his

arm, which was resting on the foot of the metal bedstead.

Her mother looked strange. Annochka did not recognize her, and turned away in fright. She moved along the wall for support, retreating almost to the corner. Feeling that she was about to cry, she raised her hands to her eyes, and in doing so struck a little shelf and knocked down a papier-mâché vase decorated with bright flowers—almost the only ornament in the house.

Her father straightened up at the sound, grasped the bed sheet convulsively, and tore it off the dead body. Slumping down on his knees, he began to groan and loudly kiss Olga Ivanovna's slender feet.

Annochka picked up the vase and replaced it on the shelf. Then she ran out of the room and threw herself on her bed, burying her head in the pillow.

The next two days consisted mostly of a strange procession of faces. Neighbours and friends came and went, speaking words of advice and consolation. Never in her life had Olga Ivanovna been in the way, but when she was laid out on the table she took up a great deal of room, and the apartment seemed smaller than ever. Annochka spoke to everyone who came, immediately forgetting who it had been and often enquiring for the very person she had just been speaking to.

One of the most frequent visitors was Mefody Silych—Parabukin's pal and drinking companion. He considered it his duty to cheer the widower, for which purpose the two of them retired to the shed or into the yard under an old acacia, where they hastily emptied the bottle which Mefody invariably brought in his pocket.

Tsvetukhin called. He placed a bunch of lilacs at the feet of Olga Ivanovna. The flowers immediately flooded the apartment with an oppressive fragrance conveying the sense of death in the house. Egor Pavlovich urged Annochka to go for a walk with him. She consented, but as soon as they had passed through the gate and he began to talk about things intended to take her mind off her grief, she regretted her decision and ran back.

Vera Nikandrovna also came. She brought an embroidered silk shawl which they wound about the head of Olga Ivanovna, covering her hands with the fringe. Her mother looked so pure and white in the gleaming frame of the silk that Annochka could not stand it; she dropped on her knees and buried her face in Vera Nikandrovna's skirts like a little child hiding from some fear, and for a long time Vera Nikandrovna sat stroking her short curls.

Pavlik was more energetic than anyone else. Never had his swift little legs been of more service than during these days of painful duties. He found

out needed addresses, escorted his father to the undertaker, and went out to the cemetery. Seeing how important he had become, his pride grew apace, especially after a call at the Meshkovs, where he had gone to tell Vitya what had happened. In spite of her own illness, Elisaveta Merkuryevna was so upset by the news that she even wanted to go to pay her last tribute to Olga Ivanovna. But she was persuaded not to get out of bed. She asked for all the details as to how Olga Ivanovna had died and urged Pavlik to run home immediately and find out if they were in need of money.

A family council was held in which Pavlik took part as the equal of his father and sister. Parabukin announced that he was not taking any charity from the Meshkovs.

"Your mother suffered enough from Merkuri when she was alive. Have you forgotten how he turned you out in the snow when you were just little tots? We'll get a subsidy for the funeral and manage somehow. Borrow something from Izvekova for the present."

"Vera Nikandrovna has already given me some money, but I hardly think it will be enough," said Annochka.

"Then ask your actor friend for something. He won't refuse you. After all, it's only a loan," said her father.

Annochka's face fell and she said nothing. Her father sank heavily down on Olga Ivanovna's empty bed, tears came to his eyes, and he gave himself up to his weeping, as he had done so often during the past few days. Annochka kept her eyes on the floor as she said bitterly:

"It's all on account of the vodka, father...."

"All right, all right, it's the vodka," he said submissively. "But can it be that everything's on account of the vodka? Isn't there anything left of me but what's on account of the vodka? You blame me for it. Well, you're smart enough, but you're not very observant. There hasn't been any vodka for a long time. Nothing but some foul mixture like truck gasoline."

"If you don't want to take anything from Vitya's mother, I'll go ask Arseni Romanych. He'll give me something," said Pavlik.

"That's an idea, son—he'll give us something. He's a good soul."

"We'll ask him for it if we find we don't have enough—only if we don't have enough," concluded Annochka.

Little by little all arrangements were made, as is always the case when a person dies. At first it seems to members of the family that they are incapable of coping with the difficulties suddenly piled upon them, and that grief has robbed them of all will to

action. But then things seem to get done of themselves, as if it were in spite of the wishes of the living that the dead were escorted to that final resting place where each must end his days.

It was not until the morning of the third day that a heavy deal coffin smelling of fresh pitch was brought. Vitya Shubnikov stood in the corner and watched them lift the body off the table and place it in the coffin.

"Lend a hand," cried Pavlik to Vitya when they tried to place the coffin on the table. With an effort Vitya forced himself to leave his corner and run to the feet of Olga Ivanovna. He slipped his hands under the coffin and strained with all his might. His fingers stuck to the unplanned boards, and when the coffin was already in place he kept fearfully wiping the pitch off his fingers, but the more he rubbed, the more distinctly he could smell the turpentine from the coffin.

An unexpectedly large number of people came to the funeral, but most of them remained at the gate when the body was carried out. Only a small number went to the cemetery. They had hired a hearse.

"Everything is very respectable," Parabukin muttered to himself as they set off. "Olga Ivanovna would have been pleased. 'Thank you, Tisha, thank you,' she would have said."

At that moment he remembered that for purposes of economy they had hired gravediggers only to dig the grave, leaving the burying for themselves. This would require a hammer and spade. The procession came to a halt at a crossing, while Pavlik and Vitya ran back to borrow the needed implements from the neighbours.

It was a sultry, windless day. The city seemed to have become reconciled to such sultry days, and every inch of its surface was absorbing the heat of the blue-white heaven. Everyone stood in silence behind the hearse. The driver, in a smudged tan duster, angrily waved his hand to chase the gadflies off his horse, which kept tossing its head in torment.

An automobile appeared on the cross street. It came up the hill at full speed, but stopped suddenly at the crossroads. Either the procession would have to move on in order to let it pass, or the automobile would have to drive up onto the sidewalk. A man half rose in the open car and hesitantly took off his cap. Then he flung open the door, jumped out, and walked over to the hearse.

Annochka recognized Kirill. He came over to her and pressed the hand which she held out to him, remaining silent for a moment. Then he said quickly and quietly, still holding her hand:

"I intended going to the cemetery with you, but

it is impossible. Some urgent business keeps me here. I hope you will forgive me."

She freed her hand from his hot grasp.

"Thank you."

Without looking at him she noticed that he had become the centre of attention. Vera Nikandrovna gave him an approving glance. Dorogomilov was watching from off to one side; he remembered Kirill as a little boy, but had not seen him since. Parabukin seemed not to understand who this man could be who had driven up in an automobile. He was worried about what was keeping Pavlik and Vitya. Tsvetukhin greeted Kirill like an old acquaintance. He wanted to ask when he might see him about an important matter, but Izvekov returned his greeting so casually that Egor Pavlovich was rather taken aback. After some hesitation he called Mefody Silych off to one side and asked whether he considered it correct to speak about business under the present circumstances.

"Why not?" said Mefody with a shrug of his shoulders, adding rhetorically: "'Sleep, ye dead, nor fret, nor pine; live, ye living, while life is thine.'"

But Tsvetukhin was too late. The boys came running up with the hammer and spade and the hearse set off again.

Kirill took leave of Annochka.

"If there is anything you need," he said, "tell mother and she will let me know. Please don't hesitate," he added, making an awkward movement toward her as though afraid others might hear him.

She lowered her head.

Kirill took a few slow steps beside her and then hurried back to the automobile. He told the driver to pull over to the corner and stop. There, he stood with his head still bared, his knees braced against the seat, watching the receding procession. Suddenly he noticed Annochka turn to look back, and caught her glance in a flash of sunlight. He stood looking for another second, then sat down and gave orders to drive on.

"Hurry up," he added. "I'm late."

He took out his watch and sat staring at it for a long time as it bobbed in his hand from the motion of the car, not seeing, or at least not comprehending, what time it was.

Parabukin fussed about the open grave at the cemetery. He approached everyone in turn, seeming to want to ask something, but only looking into people's faces and staggering away. Mefody took him by the arm.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"She was religious," whispered Parabukin.

"Do you want the burial service read?" asked Mefody in a voice everyone could hear.

"Vanity, vanity . . ." said Parabukin as though in a daze. "But it isn't fair to her, is it?"

He glanced shyly at his daughter. Annochka consulted Vera Nikandrovna, and they decided to concede to Parabukin's wishes.

He disappeared among the crosses and a minute later appeared in the company of a priest in calotte and robes. They took the top off the coffin and drew close about it. The priest waved an empty censer and began the litany for the dead. His high voice seemed to come to them from somewhere up above. The twittering of the birds in the California maple beyond the fence grew louder, while the bells on the censer jingled reply in the same tone.

Dorogomilov stood between Pavlik and Vitya. His face was lifted to the sky, which seemed infinitely far away. Mefody was so touched that he sometimes added his low bass to the chant, "Hear me, oh Lord!"

When they were taking leave of the body, the priest looked longingly at the embroidered shawl and said:

"Is the shawl to be buried with her?"

"Yes," said Annochka quickly, stepping in front of the priest to separate him from the coffin.

"Everything goes with her . . . everything . . ." muttered Parabukin.

In a jealous impulse, he suddenly covered his wife's face with a corner of the shawl.

That was the last glance Annochka had of her mother. Olga Ivanovna seemed inexpressibly pure and happy at that moment and lured Annochka with a dreadful force. Suddenly the girl rushed forward and fell on her knees at the coffin, snatching away the shawl and pressing her lips to her mother's hands, which were already soft and warmed by the sun. Annochka lifted the fingers of the upper hand, and her lips detected the roughness of the needle pricks on the tips, which seemed wholly alive. So acutely did she sense the recent fondling of those work-roughened fingers, that it was as though their caress had never been interrupted; now she was powerless to tear herself away, and kept kissing them again and again, bathing them with her tears.

People tried to draw her away. Tsvetukhin bent down to her, but she suddenly rose up strongly and stepped away from the coffin, wiping her face, which seemed to have grown smaller and was twisted with grief.

An old woman who frequented the cemetery pushed her way over to Annochka and said:

"Who was she, dearie, your sister?" and on learning that she had been her mother, she wailed in a high singsong: "Ah me! Pretty as a bride

you're looking, poor little mother! Innocent as a dove, may your soul rest in peace!"

Parabukin covered the coffin and vigorously began to hammer it closed, setting up a clatter that was echoed mockingly among the crosses. The gravedigger, who had been standing disconsolately at some distance, threw down a coil of rope. They unwound it and thrust it under the coffin, which they began to draw up onto the mound of fresh earth beside the grave.

Suddenly Mefody Silych called out like a workman:

"Turn it around, turn it around!"

"Why?" asked Parabukin helplessly.

"There'll be a cross, won't there? The feet should point to the cross."

"What do you mean? The cross goes at the head."

"Who you teaching? On the resurrection day, the dead will rise facing the cross and the east, understand? Turn the feet to the cross!"

Parabukin objected. They argued loudly for a while, then Mefody looked about for the priest. Since he had disappeared, Mefody called to the gravedigger:

"Why don't you say something?"

"Turn it around," said the gravedigger reluctantly, realizing that they valued his word, but would not pay for it.

When they had let down the coffin, Parabukin snatched the spade from Pavlik before the assembled people had thrown down the traditional handful of earth in farewell, and began to shovel with such vehemence that a cloud of reddish dust rose from the grave. He worked frenziedly. His slabby cheeks quickly paled, his thinning curls flashed white in the sun, and the perspiration poured off his forehead.

"Here, give it here," said Mefody, trying to take the spade out of his hands.

But he would not relinquish it. His fingers seemed locked in convulsion, and he kept digging on and on, ever faster, as though he were racing. Finally he began to totter with exhaustion and only go through the movements of digging.

Annochka went over to him and pulled his fingers from about the spade. Then she led him off to one side, where he collapsed on the ground, his head propped against a grave mound. He was breathing quickly and the beating of his heart could be seen through the damp shirt clinging to his chest. Utter exhaustion was expressed in his limp arms and his heavy, sprawling legs.

"Olga Ivanovna..." he muttered, punctuating his words with whistling gasps: "Our beloved... with my own hands..."

Annochka did not leave his side. Through the motionless leaves of the maple she watched the

people taking turns at the digging, and for some reason it seemed to her that she was looking through the wrong end of an opera glass, making things seem far, far away. Now Egor Pavlovich was taking the spade out of Pavlik's hands. Then in his place came Arseni Romanovich, whose long, stringy locks hung down over his face. At last they all took hold of the cross and slipped one end into the ground, so that it became short. Then again they began to dig. The head of Mefody Silych bobbed up and down and his flat nose seemed uglier than ever. When the grave was level with the ground, they began building up a mound. It rose unevenly, little by little. The birds began to twitter excitedly in the trees and the leaves trembled, now hiding the grave from Annochka, now revealing it. The people continued digging, but the bottom clay was moist, so that there was no longer any dust, and everything became brighter.

When he had caught his breath, Parabukin rose.

"I'm going," he said.

Annochka wanted to detain him, but he said:

"I don't want to see it. Later."

She failed to notice that Mefody Silych slipped away with him.

Egor Pavlovich placed the wilted lilacs on the grave. The drooping flowers still breathed the odour of death.

Then all moved in silence towards the cemetery gates.

When they reached the trolley car stop, Pavlik announced to his sister that he and Vitya were going down to the Volga. She replied that he must come home. He said that he was going to see Arseni Romanovich. No, he must come home. Who would bring back the hammer and spade if he went away? All right, then he'd just go see Vitya. The only place he could go was home, insisted Annochka. He frowned. It was difficult for him not to obey his sister. It was she who had taught him to read. At home her word had often decided important matters. Perhaps she now meant to take the entire household into her hands. Hardly. She was probably going to set up a theatre with that Egor Pavlovich of hers, which meant she would have little time for home.

"What's there to do home now?" he asked.

"Just what there was before, only it must be done better," answered his sister.

"Well I'm not going to do anything. You don't know what life's like," he said angrily.

Annochka gave him the faintest of smiles.

The trolley dragged along. The friends got off at different stops, taking Pavlik's hand as they said goodbye, or patting him on the shoulder, or even hugging him and stroking his hair. Egor Pavlovich

chucked him under the chin and Vera Nikandrovna kissed him on the cheek.

"That's the limit!" thought Pavlik.

As she passed through the yard of their house, Annochka caught sight of Mefody Shlych and her father under the acacias. They were sitting all bent over, their heads together, probably philosophizing as usual. She decided not to interrupt them.

It was necessary to tidy up the house. The tiny rooms seemed very spacious, and for the first time in her life some of the things seemed superfluous. New places had to be found for them, but at the same time she could not bring herself to change things around. It was impossible to imagine that her mother's bed could be removed. Or that the chair on which her mother had sat at the sewing machine could stand in any other place.

The most trifling circumstances assume significance when associated with death. Annochka tried to get down to work, but found herself constantly stopping. Memories robbed her of will power. Suddenly she found herself holding a scrap of material with red dots on it, one of the innumerable pieces left after cutting out some garment, and she stood motionless, staring out of the window with the scrap in her hand. With another bit of the same material she had bound up her mother's finger when it had festered from a prick. Olga Ivanovna had suffered

with the finger for a long time. On which hand had it been? On the right? No, on the left. It had been painful for her mother to hold her sewing under the needle of the machine when she stitched. Annochka could not bring herself to throw away the scrap, and placed it in one of her books. Then she gazed at a photograph whose sepia had gone pink with age. As long as she could remember she had marvelled at this photograph. Her mother was sitting in an armchair. She was wearing a wide skirt that swept down to the floor, and on her knees she was holding a little girl with a crooked bare leg—Annochka's dead sister. Next to her stood Parahukin in a short coat and wide trousers. At that time he had been a railway inspector. Annochka did not remember him as such; she remembered him only in the homespun shirt of a stevedore, or in the Tolstoy blouse of later years, when he began to seek easier jobs. The pupils of his eyes, like those of her mother and sister, were sharp little points, as though they had been pricked by a pin.

After a while she missed the customary ticking that had always filled the house. She raised her eyes to the clock. It was standing still. The hands almost met in pointing to seventeen minutes past three. She asked hesitantly:

"Perhaps we should start it going, Pavlik?"

He had not expected the question and was not prepared with an answer. He had only read that clocks were stopped if someone died in the house. But the book had said nothing about when they were started again, if at all. Perhaps they were stopped forever. After all, a person died forever.

"We'll never forget that hour anyway," said Annochka, gazing at the hands.

Again Pavlik made no reply.

"Go find out what time it is," she said.

He ran to the neighbours. When he had gone she gave the pendulum a push.

But she had not the strength to make all decisions herself. She went out to her father.

Parabukin was sitting on a board nailed to an old stump. Mefody Silych was walking up and down near him. Apparently they were having an argument. They were in the habit of worrying each other with puzzling questions, but they never quarrelled, and were essential to each other. Several years before they had met on the same step—Mefody going down, Parabukin coming up: the one was constantly being expelled from the theatre for drunkenness, the other had just sworn off liquor after an illness and was trying his hand at various jobs. From that day on they had marked time in their luck. But at the given moment Parabukin had

work, a fact which gave him a definite advantage over his friend.

He moved over and indicated that his daughter should sit down beside him. Annochka declined his offer.

"I've just come to ask you if we shouldn't give mother's bed to Pavlik. He's grown out of his own."

"I was thinking the same thing. Want me to help you?"

"No, Pavlik will help me," she said, turning away.

He nodded after her.

"She's like her mother, Olga Ivanovna. Delicate, with a kind of flutter inside. But she takes after me too: wants everything her own way. Dangerous blood, that."

"Too bad if she takes after you," said Mefody. "If she doesn't find her happiness in one place, she'll go rushing headlong after it in another. Unless her pride stops her. See how she protected her mother from that priest of yours? Death—that's a hurtful thing, brother. And singing a litany doesn't help the hurt any."

"You throwing that litany up to me? Didn't I hear you joining in the chant yourself?"

"That was my memories singing not me. The old habits singing inside me," said Mefody slyly.

"So you can find an excuse for yourself, but not for me, eh? Why do you think I called the priest? To purge myself before my dead wife, that's why. In her memory."

"Afraid of God?"

"Why bicker over it?" said Parabukin sadly. "Haven't we thrashed it all out, you and me? As if you didn't know all my hopes and dreams."

"Those dreams of yours—they're your God," said Mefody triumphantly, sitting down on the edge of the board. "There's no catching hold of your dreams, is there? Once you catch them, they're no longer dreams. Just like God: He's God as long as you can't see Him, but once you see Him, he's just a hunk of wood, an idol."

"You yourself said a fellow couldn't live without dreams," said Parabukin with an offended air.

"That's what I said. Just that. But you can't bring your dreams down to earth. Soon as you try to turn them into something real, something you can feel, there you have your hunk of wood. Get me?"

"You're a hunk of wood yourself."

"Right! Material, so to speak—a materialized dream, to use a philosophical term."

"Get along with your 'so to speak'! Everything good in a man is a dream—isn't that what you said? So if dreams are God, I must be a God my-

self. I can do anything I want. If I take it into my head to build a decent sort of world, there's nothing to stop me. Isn't that what you said? So leave me alone. Enough of your philosophizing. I've done wrong by my children, and my heart goes out to them. I can't help being religious."

Parabukin got up, grabbed the trunk of the acacia in his fist and shook down the yellow flowers. Mefody looked up at him challengingly through half-closed eyes:

"Once you're such a God, why don't you hold a fitting funeral feast in memory of Olga Ivanovna? In the Russian style. Something material."

Parabukin shuddered as though from a chill. Suddenly he turned to Mefody pleadingly:

"Do you call yourself a friend? Then bring me some consolation. Everything inside of me is crying out."

"All right. Wait here."

Mefody Silych went out with a resolute step while Parabukin, left to himself, again sat down and covered his face with his hands.

Mefody was his mentor in life, basing his superiority on his seminary learning and the fact that he was infected with the poison of doubt, which like sulphuric acid, will eat through even a stone. Parabukin considered that the world was constructed in a practical way, so practical in fact

that not everyone was sharp enough to be able to detect its workings. According to his reasoning, fate had deprived people like himself of the ability to cope with the mechanism of life. Such people were equipped with too short a spring. People with long springs were never left behind in the daily rush. But Parabukin's spring ran down too soon. Just when he had gathered enough strength to reach out for his happiness, his spring ran down. He interpreted the events following the revolution as a simplifying of the mechanism of life, so that even people with short springs could manage to get what they wanted. He had no thought of remaking himself. He believed that he would fit into the new world without any doing over. He imagined that it was for just such people as himself that things had been changed. But he was not without a conscience. On the contrary, he often suffered pangs of conscience.

For that reason, as soon as Mefody Silych had disappeared, he stopped philosophizing and began to think about his present situation. With the death of Olga Ivanovna his spring had become even shorter. If Parabukin were to lose his job now, there would simply be nothing to eat. Formerly he had been on the hands of Olga Ivanovna, whereas now he had two children on his own hands. To be sure, Annochka had finished her studies and now

could be expected to help. But what about Pavlik? If only he were twelve years old he might be passed off for fifteen, an age at which with a little effort he might find him a job—perhaps in the same organization for which he worked—the Old Goods Department. For example, they had a storehouse full of confiscated and abandoned books. Young folks sat there and ripped up the books which were of no value, placing the bindings in one pile to be sent to the shoe industry, the blank paper in another for office use, printed paper in a third for wrapping. The work was easy enough and would enable the boy to bring home a worker's rations. After all, Tikhon Platonovich was unable to feed him on the little pay he received.

Parabukin was saddened by such rational thinking, and his heart became even heavier.

It was all he could do to wait for Mefody. When the latter finally put in his appearance, the sight of his tired and guilty face wrung a groan from Parabukin. His true friend had returned emptyhanded.

"Now you wait for *me*," said Parabukin when he had recovered from the blow. Quickly he strode off to the house on his long, thin legs.

By that time Annochka had taken herself in hand and was well along with her work. Golden motes of dust scintillated in the sunlit windows.

Pavlik was scraping the dried ink off an inkwell, and the scraping of his knife was accompanied by the swishing of a broom in the next room. A folded bedstead stood against the door jamb. Bedclothes were lying everywhere.

"I'll help you, daughter," said Parabukin.

"All right. Take these blankets out and hang them up to air. Pavlik knows where the line is. Hang them near the window so I can keep an eye on them."

Her father went out and strung the line from the carvings of the window frame to an old discarded lamppost. After trying it to see that it would hold, he and his son began to carry out the blankets and hang them up. But presently he began to behave strangely, lingering in the room, rummaging among various cloths, finding reasons for sending Pavlik out alone.

Suddenly Pavlik, who was out in the yard, knocked on the windowpane and called to his sister:

"Look! Papa's carrying something away!"

Annochka ran to the door and saw her father hurrying to the gate clutching a large and awkward bundle wrapped in her mother's plaid jacket. He had already reached the centre of the yard when he realized they were after him. He broke into a lumbering run. But Annochka overtook him,

flying swiftly and almost noiselessly to the gate. She slammed it shut and placed herself against it.

Her father stood facing her.

She snatched away a corner of the jacket. The bundle was her mother's portable sewing machine. Annochka pulled at the handle.

"That'll do, that'll do," said her father softly.

But she continued pulling at the machine. He stepped back and his lips trembled in a nervous smile as he muttered:

"What are you scared of? Think I'm your enemy or something?"

Pavlik had come up and was looking at his father with brimming eyes that glowed golden in the sun.

"I only took it for a time, as a deposit ... wouldn't think of selling it ... in memory of mother ..." whined Parabukin.

Annochka still said nothing, but grasped the machine with both hands. Then she opened the lips she had been biting.

"Pavlik, hold father's hand," she said.

"Oh come on, I'll take it back myself. He's too little. He'll drop it," said Parabukin as though submitting.

But with a swift and angry movement she wrenched the machine from her father's hands, holding it with difficulty in her own slender arms.

"Take it into the house," she said to her brother. Pavlik struggled off with it, leaning far over to one side and waving his extended free arm in rhythm to his quick little steps, as though he were carrying a pail of water.

Annochka picked up the jacket and shook it without looking at her father.

"What do you want?" said Parabukin in a tone that was both hurt and insolent. "Think you can make me over? Your mother couldn't."

"I'll try," she replied curtly. Her flush subsided, and she walked slowly and lightly across the yard.

Behind the acacias, Mefody Silych squatted motionless on his heels, watching her.

* 14 *

Oznobishin sat beside Lisa's bed, expressions of fright, concern, gratitude and happiness passing over his face in rapid succession. Happiness was the strongest of his emotions, and sometimes it made him look so naively rapturous that Lisa murmured, "You funny darling!"

He adjusted Lisa's cover with a reverent touch, or rubbed his soft hands together, content with the peace that reigned after the passing of two tornadoes: his arrest and Lisa's illness.

When he heard that Lisa had been taken ill, he had thought that she would surely and immediately die. But she was recovering. He could tell that by the steady light gleaming in her eyes. But the most important thing was that she was glad to see him. She had suffered on hearing of his mysterious disappearance, as well as later, when she kept wondering what was happening to him in that dreadful jail to which he had been taken perhaps on her account. Oznobishin was touched to the depths of his soul when she told him that her anxiety for him had made her forget even her own illness. Who did not know what it meant when a woman suffered torture for the fate of a man? And was it not wonderful that when her life had been in danger, her soul had so yearned toward him that instead of sending for a doctor, she had sent her little son to find him?

On that cold night Vitya had wandered in the dark, knocking at strange doors to ask where Oznobishin lived. He had been answered by utter silence, or coarse oaths, or suspicious questions as to who he was and what he wanted. Nobody had heard of any Oznobishin, for Anatoli Mikhailovich had only recently moved into that district.

And so the child had run from one door to another, from one shuttered window to another, feeling for doorbells in the dark or pounding with his

heels on locked gates. He experienced no fear, or rather, fear was behind him—back where his mother was lying on the bed with blood trickling out of her mouth. If she had not hesitated to send him out into the night, it meant that Oznobishin was evidently the only person capable of stopping that flow of blood. He ran home wet with perspiration and so horrified by his failure that his mother became frightened and apologized for having sent him.

On the following day she asked Vitya to go to the notary's office where both she and Anatoli Mikhailovich worked. But Oznobishin had not been at the office that day. She sent Vitya a second time to find out Oznobishin's exact address, and to go directly to his house. But Vitya brought back even more puzzling news: Anatoli Mikhailovich had not spent the night at home. She sent Vitya to one of the women who worked in their office with a note asking her to find out from Oznobishin's relatives what had happened to him. Vitya returned with the reply that nobody knew of any relatives.

Merkuri Avdeyevich looked upon all these efforts with alarm and disapproval. He thought up various means of talking her out of her frenzied efforts: the times were dangerous—anything might be expected to happen. Why chase the child all over town for nothing? One day Lisa forbade his

going even to market, the next she sent him out in the middle of the night without herself knowing where. And why make such a fuss about that Oznobishin? What was he to Lisa after all? Her husband? Her fiance? A suitor, perhaps, or even. . .

"That's my business. He is my friend," interrupted Lisa.

"If he's a friend he'll come of his own accord. Here's your chance to test his friendship."

"I implore you to help me find him!"

He realized there was no point in raising any further objections.

But no sooner had he admitted having seen the night patrol take Oznobishin in custody than he realized it would have been better to have kept his mouth shut. Lisa became frantic. She announced that she herself would go to find him; if they refused to help her, it could only mean that they wanted to torture her. And indeed it was clear she would sooner injure herself than fail to find Oznobishin.

With the utmost caution Meshkov began making the rounds of militia stations, trying to find out where the arrested Anatoli Mikhailovich might be. At last he gently told his daughter that Oznobishin was in an H. D. What was an H. D.? A House of Detention. Jail. The news shocked and gladdened Lisa. The uncertainty had been harder

for her to bear than the sad truth. She told her father that she would kiss him if she had a right to kiss anybody, and this statement was a sad admission of the seriousness of her illness.

Then she developed a new obsession—to send Oznobishin food packages while he was in prison. It turned out that there was no harm in Vitya's selling old things at the market in order to buy sugar and pork fat with the proceeds. Or in his standing in the line of visitors at the jail to deliver his package. Or if in general he tried to bring comfort to Anatoli Mikhailovich in his hour of trial. Vitya was a big boy now and should realize that it was his duty to do good.

Meshkov muttered to himself that of course any trifle was too much to do for her father, but for some stranger named Oznobishin she did not spare even her own son. But didn't Merkuri Avdeyevich pray every day for "those journeying by sea or land, for the ailing and the imprisoned"? And there was no denying that it was one of these "imprisoned" for whom his daughter was caring. He was left with no alternative but to reconcile himself to the situation. . . .

Only now, as she lay watching the agitated Anatoli Mikhailovich, did Lisa realize how much she had done for him. He confessed to having wept the first time they brought a package from

her into his cell, and he realized that that last evening they had spent together held special significance for both of them.

"What did they do to you in there? What was it like?" asked Lisa, trying to imagine what he had suffered.

"Ah, Lisa!" he sighed, rocking his ungainly body as though he were weary of being questioned.

"Was it very bad?"

"Thank goodness it's all over, Lisa."

"What was it like? Why don't you want to tell me? Is it forbidden?"

"No. I would tell you anyway, no matter what it was like. But let's not talk about it just now—not just now."

"You poor thing! How you must have suffered!"

"I suffered thinking of you."

"Oh no! I don't count. But you..."

"Everything turned out all right for me, quite all right. A sane and sensible man came to my aid. But even so, it was dreadful to know that at any moment I might be accused of some crime and given a sentence when I knew I was innocent. Absolutely innocent. Do you believe that?"

"That you are innocent? Of course you are! Whom have you ever injured?" said Lisa, turning

away with a guilty sense of not having followed what he said.

"What sort of person was he? A Bolshevik?" she asked.

"Probably. A member of the commission that investigated my case. I don't know what his name was. They promised to find out for me. He made a thorough study of the situation and naturally couldn't find anything wrong."

"What was he expecting to find?"

"Well, you understand—a case concerning a former tsarist official. As though I intentionally got born and grew up under the tsarist regime!" said Oznobishin with a short laugh. "He finally became convinced that I was small fry. They set their nets for a pike, and caught a minnow."

Lisa gave him a puzzled glance, then smiled faintly:

"They may set their nets for minnows as well."

"Too bad. Then I'll have to prove I'm an amoeba."

She became more serious. All of a sudden she had the desire to understand him better. She eagerly gave rein to her new feeling for him, and perhaps this explained why she actually seemed to know Oznobishin well and to share his views on many things.

Mentally she divided the story of their relationship into two periods. The first was long and uneventful, the second was brief, but quite unexpectedly it had led to the step determining their entire future.

In the past Lisa had not met Oznobishin very often—only once or twice a year, in a store or on the boulevard or at some charity affair. Usually he only bowed to her, though it is true he did this with more than the usual warmth. Once in Lipki Park she noticed that he was watching her intently. This displeased her, and apparently he was aware of her displeasure, for the next time they met he greeted her with exaggerated formality. She did not like this either, and laughed to herself: "Dear me, how touchy he is!" After that she did not see him for a long time.

Their next encounter was after Lisa had already left her husband. She ran into Anatoli Mikhailovich on the street under very amusing circumstances. She had just come out of a drugstore, and the bundle she was carrying came untied, scattering phials, boxes and little packets all over the pavement. It was during the spring thaw, so that everything became muddy. With her arms full of other packages, Lisa was making a clumsy effort to collect the fallen things when Oznobishin hurried to her aid. He bought a fresh newspaper at a near-by

stand, packed up the damaged goods, and offered to see Lisa home. He was in a jolly mood, and all the way kept joking about having discovered the secret of Lisa's cosmetics and her preference in toilet articles, and declared that he would be sure to keep in mind her favourite scent (a bottle of Eau de Cologne had cracked, and soon the paper was soaked with essence of mignonette). Whether the dazzling March sun and the wind laden with the smell of melting snow had anything to do with it or not is hard to say, but the fact remains that Lisa was pleased by the amusing simplicity of Oznobishin's speech and even the queer-ness of his body, which reminded her of a kangaroo, with its short arms, dumpy torso, and clumsy feet.

They parted friends. She saw him once again just before the revolution. Her divorce from Shubnikov had been dragging on endlessly, and she asked Oznobishin to recommend a clever lawyer, since Victor Semyonovich was constantly placing barriers in the way of getting a separation, cunningly anticipating her every step in the consistory and in court. Oznobishin named several lawyers, and offered advice in a sympathetic and business-like manner. After the revolution such advice became unnecessary: marriages were annulled on the application of only one of the parties concerned, women were proclaimed free and the equals of

men, and the state refused to interfere in the wishes of husbands and wives to live together or apart, giving legal sanction to either state as soon as couples made their desires known.

When the hard years of civil war began and Lisa, like everyone else, was faced with the necessity of finding employment, she told Oznobishin of her need. He had long since discarded his uniform as a state official and dreamed of finding a job in some place where they would not be apt to remember him in the frock coat of the Public Prosecutor's Office. He had temporarily accepted employment as a notary's assistant, and suggested that Lisa come to work in the same office. To be sure, there was nothing very romantic about the work, but it was unostentatious, bureaucratic in essence, and therefore safe. No serious demands could be made from anyone in such a position: just sit and draw up title deeds to houses in the suburbs and outlying districts at estimates not exceeding the official limit set for private property, or register powers of attorney given by husbands to their wives—that was all. Merkuri Avdeyevich agreed that working at the notary office was quite safe however you looked at it, and Lisa took the job.

There she began to meet Anatoli Mikhailovich every day. He showed her those innocent marks of

attention which easily win a woman's favour. Sometimes they left work together and strolled down the dismal streets to the Volga. After her mother's death, Lisa had come to feel lonelier than ever. Her son was the only person in the world whom she loved, but her heart was so full of yearning that even her constantly growing mother love could not satisfy it.

Probably nothing brings people together more quickly than similar experiences. Anatoli Mikhailovich was a bachelor, and he was used to being lonely. But he constantly tasted the bitterness of a life whose dullness had become habitual. He did not consider himself unhappy, but when Lisa asked him if he had ever been happy, he replied in all sincerity that he had not. For a good ten years he had tried to make a career for himself, believing that once he accomplished this, happiness would be his reward. But the making of a career demanded such painstaking efforts that he gave up all hope of achieving happiness. This admission led Lisa to confide in him. She expressed her conviction that happiness never came of itself, that it had to be won, conquered, taken by force. Once she had let happiness slip through her fingers, and now she had lost the secret and did not know how to plan her future. They were both lonely, though in different ways; they were both unhappy, though for

different reasons. This drew them together. But neither he nor she felt that their feelings had completely merged. They knew only that they were drawn to each other and that they had a deep interest in each other.

Lisa's illness changed everything.

Way back in the early spring Merkuri Avdeyevich had noticed how thin she was getting, that she coughed and had spells of overexcitement followed by exhaustion. She herself felt a constant longing for rest and quiet. Her father insisted that she see a doctor. Oznobishin found out the address of a well-known specialist from the Medical School and could not understand why Lisa kept putting off visiting him. One day she confessed to Oznobishin that she had seen a doctor a long time ago, and what he had told her was so frightening that she dared not confide it to her family. She felt that her former life was over forever. The cruel stamp of her illness made her an outcast. She feared for Vitya more than for anyone else: it was expedient that he be isolated from her, but how could this be done? Everyone knew that the cure for tuberculosis was a luxury only the rich could afford. The poor were mice with whom the disease played like a cat. Lisa could only resign herself to her fate.

Anatoli Mikhailovich stubbornly opposed such a point of view. If Lisa were unable to take her-

self in hand, he himself would supervise her treatment. Her head was full of old-fashioned ideas. As though there were no help for a disease which was so widespread and had been so thoroughly studied! Millions of people fell ill and millions were cured! Thank goodness Lisa lived in a university town and had the most advanced medical knowledge at her disposal. It was necessary only to show determination. If Lisa found it hard to tell her father what was wrong with her, she could give the disease some other name. But take treatments she should, and Anatoli Mikhailovich would stake his head on it that she would get well.

To be sure, it was much easier for Oznobishin to make enthusiastic speeches than to effect a cure. As a lawyer, he had studied the art of rhetoric, but he had scarcely more faith in the art of medicine than in the art of rhetoric. For that reason, after he had found out all he could about eminent doctors, he began to listen to popular beliefs as to how to fight tuberculosis, and insisted that Lisa should not be contemptuous of folk wisdom. Not a day passed but what he brought her some new cure—a pot of aloes, or some lard and butter. He himself kept careful watch to see that all advice and instructions were carried out to the letter. He accumulated a whole collection of phials in his

desk at the office, while his window sill was decorated with the blue-green, prickly, dagger-like leaves of aloe plants.

Lisa obeyed him with a kind of amusement. She was amazed by the fact that, instead of repelling him, her illness only bound him closer to her. His concern for her not only grew, but changed in its very nature until it developed into adoration. Lisa became the centre of his universe. He devoted most of his thoughts to her, and she realized that if he should suddenly disappear, she would be deprived of her mainstay in life.

On the evening he had brought her that touching bouquet of poplar twigs and they had gone out for a walk, their conversation had turned to reminiscences. They had already lived through certain experiences together, and they wished to be utterly frank with each other.

They sat in the park where an orchestra was playing. At times the music lent the proper accompaniment to their conversation, at others it interfered with it. The people strolling along the paths were intent on their own thoughts and conveyed the impression that life was gay and carefree. The evening was cold, and Lisa was pleased to feel Oznobishin's arm in hers. They left the park and roamed the drowsing streets until the entire city was wrapped in the silence of midnight. Suddenly

realizing that she might catch cold, Anatoli Mikhailovich gave her half his coat, placing one arm about her shoulder to hold it in place. When they had almost reached her house he said:

"If we can weather these hard times together, the easy ones will be particularly easy."

"Sometimes even now, for brief moments, the hard things seem easy."

Suddenly he said:

"Would you consent to be my wife, dear?"

She was prepared neither for the "dear" nor for the "wife," a word which was associated with a gone and forgotten period of her life. She did not answer for some time, and then said the first thing that came into her head:

"You should have considered well before making such a proposal."

"I have had plenty of time."

"In all seriousness," she said with a bitter sort of merriment, "you can't even kiss me—I'm contagious."

He immediately stopped, drew her face toward him, and kissed her without releasing her from under his coat. They took a few steps in silence, he holding her tightly all the while. When they reached the gate he slipped off the coat. She felt him take her face in his hands and once more press his lips to hers. With a sudden shiver of cold she

opened the gate and slammed it after her, running through the darkness to the house. . . .

Like all sick people, Lisa gave herself up to her thoughts during the long hours she lay in bed. They floated through her memory like slow clouds, extending from one end of her life to the other. She compared their colours and their strange contours. She saw herself among them. She made them pass in reverse order and distorted their shapes, as the wind distorts real clouds. In this way she went over and over every step she had taken in life.

While Oznobishin was in jail Lisa could not help wondering at the wanton play of circumstances which had taken him away from her to prison in the same way Kirill Izvekov had once been taken. What had Lisa then done to ease Kirill's lot? Nothing. Could it be that she loved Oznobishin more than she had loved Kirill? Oh no. But how much more helpless she had been at that time. Now she was chained to her bed, but never before had her word held such power; even her father gave in to her in everything. But in those distant days she had been powerless in spite of her good health. To whom could she have turned for support? She had not had any close friends among the girls of her acquaintance, and even if she had had, what could they have offered her other than

girlish curiosity? Vera Nikandrovna had treated her like a child. And indeed, had not this first love of hers been childish?

To be sure it had been exquisitely beautiful! Even now when she suddenly recalled how Kirill had held her fingers in his rough hand, filling her with a sense of the indomitable power behind his timidity, so that she became frozen with fear and an indefinable ecstasy—even now Lisa felt the blood slowly rise to her cheeks. Never would she dream with anyone as she had dreamed with Kirill. Once she had said to him:

"We'll always read out loud to each other. Our favourite authors. And if we read about unhappy people, we'll be all the happier, thinking how fortunate we are not to be unhappy like them."

"No," Kirill had answered, "if we read about unhappy people we'll think up ways to make them happy, and that will make you and me happiest of all."

Lisa still remembered this answer, and how he had looked at her with eyes that seemed to be lighted from within. At that time she had loved that answer and how he had looked at her when he made it. Did Lisa remember now what his eyes were like? They were brown. Light brown. Almost hazel. But just what shade? Pavlik Parabukin also

had light brown eyes, but they did not in any way resemble Kirill's. Kirill's were always changing colour—now they assumed a dull shine like old bronze, again they brightened like amber. In the evening they became so dark that once Lisa had laughingly said: "Don't look at me with such gipsy eyes!"

What if Kirill had been the father of Vitya?

Perhaps then she would have had those beloved eyes with her always, and would never have forgotten the nuances which faded with the years. But Vitya had his mother's eyes, Lisa's eyes. He had inherited almost nothing from Shubnikov. He was her son, and hers alone. Strange as it might seem, he reminded her more of Kirill than of his father. But was this so strange after all? While pregnant, Lisa had thought infinitely more of Kirill than of the child's father. All women are convinced that such things are significant.

Even now her thoughts kept turning to Izvekov—more and more rarely to be sure, and more contemplatively. Formerly, whenever she had gone over her keepsakes and taken out the notebook marked with the initials "E" and "K," she had sat for long spells with the book clasped in listless fingers. The inscription Kirill had written on the first page had not faded in the least. "Liberty, Independence." At first these words had meant for Lisa

what she might expect the future to hold. Later they came to represent what she had lost. More than once she had shed tears over this book. On one occasion she had decided to copy Lermontov's *Farewell* into it, and filled the entire second and the beginning of the third page:

*Farewell, farewell!
Ah, who could guess
One word could spell
Such hopelessness!
When thou art gone
My joy is dead,
My life is done,
My heart is bled.
Soon thou shalt grace
A distant shore,
And I thy face
Shall see no more.
Oh, come to me,
Brief hope inspire.
And quell desire
With passion's. . .*

At this point the writing ended in a jagged line: Lisa had broken off on hearing the steps of Victor Shubnikov approaching. He was in high spirits and entered boisterously, smelling of the barbershop and November wind.

"Hurry and get ready!" he had exclaimed happily. "We're going to see an imported movie machine with sound recordings. They say it's something marvellous! When they smash a plate on the screen you can hear it crash! Or if it's an automobile, you can hear the horn—honk, honk! Like out on the street! Hurry up or we'll be late! The 'samovar's' waiting downstairs!" (The "samovar" was his pride—a newly acquired automobile which was one of the first in Saratov.)

Thus the poem remained unfinished, and Lisa had never found the courage to write anything else in the book. But sometimes she would take it up and whisper the missing words whose place was taken by the jagged line:

*And quell desire
With passion's fire!*

Yes, of course this had been childish love. Lisa no longer wept when going over her keepsakes. Nowadays she merely became sad with a sadness that was meditative and almost consoling. Quite recently she had come across the photograph of her graduating class. The centre of the picture was taken up by the school principal and teachers, and around them in a precise oval were distributed the photographs of popeyed young ladies with bows under their chins and their hair

piled on top of their heads. Lisa Meshkova was pasted next to the teacher of religion, a fierce-looking priest whose black beard grew mostly in breadth, so that it rested on his shoulders. Perhaps it was because of this extraordinary neighbour that Lisa looked so terrified. But probably it was just because she was still very young and had no idea what one did on appearing at the photographer's with one's hair all curled up and one's whole head stuck full of hairpins.

It had, indeed, been childish love. What forces had Lisa commanded capable of opposing the world of malice and misfortune which had led Kirill to jail? Perhaps she should have followed Kirill into exile? But her father had prevented this by marrying her off. Perhaps on leaving her husband the first time she should not have returned to her father's house, but have fled directly to the Olonets wilderness? But her married state prevented this, for at that time she was already with child. Perhaps such reckless thoughts had never entered Lisa's head? They had indeed. What legions of reckless thoughts besiege the mind in moments of misery and despair! But few reckless or even bold thoughts ever go further than the mind, where they find as safe and sound a haven as unfulfilled good intentions find in the heart.

Lisa made no attempt to justify her past. She only visualized her own helplessness at that time. She had not possessed a will of her own. She began to discover her own will only after losing Kirill.

One does not mature until one has experienced grief. But not all grief can be coped with even by those who are mature. Even now her six years of life with Victor Semyonovich seemed like a nightmare. In spite of the numerous details making up the dashing biography of Shubnikov, all the years of her marriage merged in her memory into a period of unlighted gloom. It was because of her child that Lisa had remained in the home of her husband, but later it was because of her child that she broke away from it. She was filled with a sense of responsibility toward her son, whose rearing she accepted as her duty. But she was convinced that to rear him in his father's house would mean rearing a second Shubnikov: the child would necessarily become like his father if constantly faced by his father's example. So she left this house in obedience to her duty as a mother, just as formerly she had remained in obedience to a false conception of this same duty.

At that time her son was five years old. One evening she picked him up out of the bed where he was sleeping and slipped down the back stair-

way in nothing but the dress she was wearing, just as nearly six years before she had made her first attempt to leave her husband. Her decision had been maturing for too long a time for any momentary weakness to frustrate it now. Too long had she waited for aid to believe that aid would be forthcoming.

Sometimes she so longed for someone's help that she sought support from sources where it obviously could not be expected. Thus she had once confided in Tsvetukhin, awkwardly and despairingly, during an intermission at the theatre as she had strolled through the foyer beside him, nervously twisting the program in her fingers.

Not having seen Egor Pavlovich for several years, she now discovered new traits in him every time they met. The charm which had once dazzled her seemed to have diminished. She thought he had changed, but actually it was she who was different. He had, as it were, faded in her eyes; what she had once found picturesque in his manner, now seemed affectation, and to her own incredulity she even detected a certain vulgarity about him. However, his richly modulated voice even now had the power to move her.

Here, among these well-dressed, sedate couples slowly circling in the foyer and staring at the particularly well-dressed and sedate pair which

was Shubnikova and Tsvetukhin, both of whom were well known, Lisa for some inexplicable reason told Egor Pavlovich that her life was a failure and she wanted to change things, but did not know how. He listened to her attentively, and when she had finished answered that apparently all her unhappiness stemmed from the gift nature had bestowed upon her.

"What gift?"

"Purity of heart," he had replied with a sigh, as though this were something to be regretted. He even called Lisa a madonna and quoted a line of poetry: "An image pure of purest loveliness." She sensed a certain levity in his tone, and this at a moment when she yearned to unburden her heart!

"You once warned me against my merchant."

"True, but you did not listen to me. Now it is too late for warnings. You must seek advice."

"What advice? You have had much experience of life; I am ready to listen to anything you have to say."

"You demand too much honesty," he replied thoughtfully, with a touch of weariness in his tone. "People are dual by nature. Even a beggar plays a role unless he is certain no one is watching. There is no escaping this bit of wisdom culled from the hard facts of life. It has curative powers."

"Couldn't you speak more clearly? How should I apply this wisdom?"

He assumed the sly and rather comical look of a Mephistopheles as he said softly:

"The fragrance of a lie is more comforting than the stench of the truth."

The words repulsed her. She took a few steps in silence, as though stunned, before replying:

"The poet has expressed it more worthily: 'Deceit which exalts.' Wasn't that it?"

"Yes. Only if I remember correctly you are shy of poetry. For that reason I translated the idea into prose."

"But you began with poetry, and if you have no objection I shall end with it: I prefer to remain 'an image pure.' Please take me back to my box."

Tsvetukhin's eloquence and flirtatiousness caused him to fall surprisingly low in Lisa's regard, although there had been a moment when he might have become her close friend, for Shubnikov's absurd persecutions drove her to seeking friendship.

She avoided recalling her life with Shubnikov, but not long before her illness a moment occurred which brought back her entire married life with the vividness with which life is reviewed at the

moment of death, according to the testimony of those who have been miraculously restored.

Lisa was walking down the familiar street where stood the large store which had once belonged to the Shubnikovs. While still some distance away she noticed a crowd of idlers gaping at some busy workmen in coarse overalls. She concluded that the excitement was caused by another of the frequent fires resulting from the makeshift stoves people were installing in their apartments. She could hear the ring of metal and the splintering of boards. She crossed to the other side of the street and saw that activities were centred about the store. Involuntarily she quickened her steps.

With firemen's hooks the workmen were removing the trade sign. Already the three-foot gold letters spelling SHUBNIKOV were hanging askew from the damaged metal frame. The hooks rasped over the tin and the huge nails screeched as they were wrenched out of their rusty bed in the rotten boards. At last the sign and pieces of the wooden frame came crashing down onto the pavement amidst the triumphant shouts of little boys.

It was indeed no more than an instant, corresponding with the instant when the sign struck the asphalt, that Lisa, in the all-illuminating flash of

a trance, saw herself once more sitting behind the cash desk of Shubnikov's store, saw her entire existence at the Shubnikovs', and thought the endless thoughts that had once tortured her. Then everything went out like a photographer's flash-light, and for some reason her heart became as light as though she had been suddenly relieved of some haunting fear. The scraping of the hooks, the children's cries, the splintering of the wooden frame as it was torn away from the metal, were to her as the joyful sounds of early spring. She was filled with a bold confidence: the Shubnikovs were done for, once and for all! It even became unnecessary for her to chase away her memories, for they had lost their terror. . . .

Thus through Lisa's mind floated those distant clouds, so varied, yet linked in uninterrupted flow: Kirill, Tsvetukhin, Shubnikov. And then Oznobishin, the cloud which was nearest of all and covered half the heaven, though its colour and contours were made indistinguishable by proximity. Who of the four had shown such touching concern for her welfare? No one could accuse him of being prompted by anything but love during these difficult days of her illness when his care and kindness were her main support.

He was truly good, though sometimes Lisa caught a sly glint in his eye: suddenly an expres-

sion of subtle ridicule would creep into his loving glance and a cunning look come over his face. But this lasted for only a second, after which he would again laugh good-naturedly and attempt to smooth everything over. He willingly discussed morality, considering that the times should teach people the superiority of good over evil.

"It shows a bad knowledge of arithmetic to think that evil is more profitable than good. A good man is always luckier than a bad one. Outside of the fact that a good man's liver is always in better order, people are more willing to help him, because they count on his goodness. Everyone keeps that rainy day in mind: I helped you then, you help me now."

Lisa listened to him and then said thoughtfully:

"I remember that they never taught me anything but goodness—in different ways, but always the same tune: do good, do good. My father kept hammering it into me from morning to night. Mother too. And at school. And in church. Good, good, good. I never heard anything else. They taught me to love, and to forgive, and to fear God, and to live in peace and comfort. Then when I grew up and looked about me I saw that on every hand there was fighting and hate and fearlessness and the smell of gunpowder. What about

all those admonitions to do good that still kept ringing in my ears? What am I to teach my son now?"

"Teach him to do good," replied Oznobishin without a moment's hesitation.

"In order to make him as helpless as his mother was? There you are with your idyllic visions—a drowsy little green town, a song floating over the Volga, fishermen sitting quietly in their boats, gardens all around, goats browsing on the green grass, luscious meadows as far as the eye can see, copies of the *Niva* magazine for 1890 on the library table, and a cuckoo clock on the wall. That is how you would paint life to me. But they put you in jail."

"It was goodness that got me out of jail," answered Oznobishin triumphantly. "When they were convinced I had done no harm, they let me go."

A smile flitted across his face, but presently he said contritely:

"When I worked in the office of the Public Prosecutor I was firmly convinced that jail was a just institution, but when I landed there myself, I was convinced of the opposite. Strange, isn't it? Now I find that the only just thing to do is to free people, and I must repay the kindness done to me in the same coin. Only when I have done this will I know peace of mind."

Lisa no longer asked what had happened to him in jail. He found it painful to recall, and it was enough for her that he was now free.

It was true that this experience had robbed him of his peace of mind. Suddenly he would imagine that once again he was engulfed in the silence of solitary confinement, and the fear that this might happen in actuality made him constantly figure what he could do to remove such a dread possibility. There must not be the slightest suspicion of his reliability, and for this reason he must hasten to prove that he was true to his word.

The documents of the former Prosecutor's Office had been transferred to the Gubernia Archives. In the low, damp catacombs of this building Oznobishin found dusty folders and record books, some of which were tied into piles, others simply dumped in heaps on the floor. It seemed hopeless to find anything in that chaos. But Oznobishin was lucky: an old woman of his acquaintance, who had been working in the archives for many years and had once been known to all the court officials as *My Past and Thoughts** told him that all records from 1910 on had recently been put into one of the far rooms, where he could see them if he wished.

* The title of Herzen's famous *Memoirs*.

There he found himself alone with mountains of papers. He cleared a space near the window where he could more easily make out the titles on the folders, and quite unexpectedly unearthed several packs dated 1910. He soon got on the trail of what he was after, and discovered an official prison report addressed to the Assistant Prosecutor stating that Ksenia Afanasyevna Ragozina, who had died in prison of childbirth while her case was being investigated, had been buried in common grave No. so-and-so in Resurrection Cemetery. He was overjoyed that his memory had not deceived him, and continued leafing through book after book, hoping to find other documents concerning the late Ragozina.

The folder containing documents from the Prosecutor's Office itself fell into his hands. He opened it up. It included all sorts of letters and appeals from officials of the office to His Excellency, and on each was written the Prosecutor's decision.

Oznobishin was immediately carried back into an environment of which he had been so much a part that it was as though the door of his own home had suddenly been opened to him after a long absence. He clearly heard the voices of his colleagues and his superiors discussing transfers, promotions, the awarding of Orders of Anna and

Stanislav, appointments, living and travelling expenses.

Suddenly among these voices he heard his own, his quietly tactful voice, rising from the perfect penmanship of an application he himself had written. He, Anatoli Mikhailovich Oznobishin, candidate for a judgeship, was registering a complaint against the Assistant Prosecutor for not allowing him to take part in investigating the case of one Pyotr Petrovich Ragozin, accused of a crime against the state. The application testified to Oznobishin's eagerness to serve his tsar and country. Across the top of the application His Excellency had written: "Spoke personally with the Assistant Prosecutor, recommending that this request be gratified."

Anatoli Mikhailovich froze on the spot with the open folder in his hands. This was a memorable document, a dreadful document. This document kept on living a life of which Oznobishin wished to deny the existence. And the document had no right to live that former life, once it had been denied to Oznobishin himself. The document spoke of the applicant's eagerness to serve the crown. The document confirmed things which Oznobishin must deny if he wished to save himself.

Anatoli Mikhailovich turned to the window. The panes were dusty, and through them could be

seen the drooping leaves of the heat-tortured trees. He listened. The archive rooms were deaf and dumb.

Anatoli Mikhailovich placed his damp palm on the paper and twisted it slightly, so that it was noiselessly torn out of the folder. Oznobishin hid it in his breast pocket. The folder had been sewn together and the documents numbered, but there was no list of contents, so that nobody could tell just what document was missing. Oznobishin buried the folder under a heap of papers in a dark corner and returned to the window. He carefully tied up the records he had been through, placed them on the window sill, and wiped his face with his handkerchief. His fingers were trembling slightly.

On his way out of the archives he mentioned the folders he had placed on the window sill and asked that nobody touch them as they might soon be needed:

"A very important person is interested in them," he said with a meaningful look. "They have historical and revolutionary significance."

The workers in the archives promised to carry out his request. The promise was given with the ease born of indifference, for what was taking place seemed to them more like a universal deluge than mere disorder. Carters continued drag-

ging in mountains of documents. The corridors and stairways were blocked with papers, and if a whole cartload had disappeared, it is doubtful that anyone would have been the wiser.

Anatoli Mikhailovich decided to burn the stolen paper. But on reaching home he changed his mind: the neighbours might smell the smoke, and it would be difficult to do away with the ashes. He tore the document into infinitesimal bits which he intended to throw into the garbage can, but this also seemed dangerous. Suddenly he had an inspiration: among the supplies of his bachelor household was a little flour; with this he made some dough, rolled the bits of paper into it, wrapped it in a newspaper, and went out.

It was dusk when he reached the Volga. As he descended the hill to the riverbank he met people, worn out by the heat, making their way to the city. A purple haze veiled the plains of the opposite bank, and the river flowed past slowly and silently, like molten lead.

Oznobishin threw his dough into the water, where it sank like a stone. After watching the rings on the surface for a minute, he went on his way. If only he could drown his entire past so easily! But this past trailed him, and to his own surprise seemed to have become even more ominous. Perhaps some other incriminating document

was to be found in that sea of archives? Perhaps Oznobishin had attracted attention by entering the archives? Who knew?

On the following day he learned that his interrogator in jail had been none other than Pyotr Petrovich Ragozin. In an instant everything seemed to turn against Oznobishin; the earth seared the soles of his feet. The person whom he had counted his benefactor, and to whom he had intended showing his gratitude, proved to be not only sober and intelligent but cunning as well. The hurricane had not passed; it was carrying Anatoli Mikhailovich with it into the unknown.

Oznobishin rushed to Lisa's. In the greatest distress he told her about the incident in the jail, and she was overwhelmed by the extraordinary, and what seemed to her menacing, course events had taken. No sooner had they recovered from the first shock and begun to consider whether it was necessary to take any measures or not, when another surprise awaited them.

Long before the usual hour Merkuri Avdeyevich came home from work. He seemed a bit upset by the presence of Oznobishin, but only for a moment. He sat down by his daughter's bed and addressed Anatoli Mikhailovich almost like a relative:

"I just ran in on my way past. I wanted to let Lisa know in case anything should happen. But I'm glad I found you here, because you may be able to give me some good advice."

His speech was incoherent, he breathed as though he had been running, and his look was despairing.

"Hm. They sent for me at work. Urgent. At three o'clock I am to be at—well—you can see for yourself. . . ."

He handed Oznobishin a paper. The Finance Department of the City Soviet requested citizen Meshkov to report to Room 40 to Comrade. . . .

"Ragozin," put in Anatoli Mikhailovich, who had been silently reading Meshkov's summons.

Lisa raised herself on her elbow and asked in a whisper:

"At the jail?"

"The jail?" repeated Merkuri Avdeyevich.

"Why at the jail?"

Oznobishin got up and took a few steps. For some time none of them could utter a word. Merkuri Avdeyevich looked in fright at his daughter, who was propped up on her elbows, exposing the dark hollows at her collar bones.

"Maybe it's another Ragozin?" said Anatoli Mikhailovich hesitantly.

"What other one could it be?" said Merkuri Avdeyevich with a disparaging gesture. "It's that same one, I know."

"The same one? The one who was in jail?" asked Oznobishin.

"Once upon a time. Now they're all at large. I found out that it's the same Ragozin who used to rent the little house in my yard. Ten years ago. It was there he was living when they arrested him."

"Surely it's not Pyotr Petrovich?" said Lisa.

"The very one."

"But that's splendid. He'll be sure to remember you."

"I don't know what's better—to remember me or to forget me. What was it you two were saying about the jail?"

Anatoli Mikhailovich quickly told him the story of his acquaintanceship with Ragozin, and the three of them set about trying to untangle the nasty knot.

"What could that mean?" asked Meshkov in a puzzled tone. "He's head of the jail, and is in charge of finance. That makes him a sort of—head boss, eh?"

"Why shouldn't he be? He was too smart for the tsarist regime to cope with," said Anatoli Mikhailovich.

"Maybe they just call it the Finance Department, but in reality you stick your nose in and—bang!—there you are behind bars, eh?"

"But why? It says here plain enough—the City Soviet," objected Anatoli Mikhailovich without too much assurance.

"But the Room 40?" asked Meshkov with a significant glance.

He gave a deep sigh, took his comb out of his wallet and began to comb his beard, but soon gave up the attempt and clumsily tried to return the wallet to his pocket.

"Almost time to go. Oh Lord! What do you advise me to do? How should I behave once I'm in that Room 40?"

"Tell the truth, Merkuri Avdeyevich, and that's all. Evil is helpless in the face of the truth."

Merkuri Avdeyevich peered intently at Oznobishin as though amazed by his silky tone.

"Well, I'm glad you've got such a man by you," he said to his daughter with another sigh. "Why should we have to endure all these trials? Haven't I done enough good in my life? Rented my house to that very Ragozin even when he was under surveillance. And was easy with him—didn't charge him much. Think he'll remember, eh? No, of course not! People don't remember the good things these days. Ah me!..."

"Yes they do!" cried Lisa with an imploring look at Anatoli Mikhailovich.

Meshkov leaned over and kissed his daughter.

"Should we get some things together for you to take with you?" she asked anxiously.

"What for? I'll be coming back, won't I, eh?" he asked, looking about as though he were in a strange house.

He took a few slow steps toward Oznobishin and suddenly stretched out his arms in a narrow, hesitant little embrace.

"If anything happens to me, take care of my Lisa and grandson."

He glanced at his daughter:

"Are things all fixed up between you?"

He answered his own question with a nod.

"Thank the Lord for that," he said. "Well then . . . in case I don't return . . . you have my blessing."

He made the sign of the cross first over Lisa, then over Anatoli Mikhailovich.

"Goodbye. Kiss Vitya for me, Lisa. Where is he? I'm going. Well, goodbye."

He shuffled out, all bent over and dishevelled.

For a while Lisa remained lying motionless, then she suddenly turned her face to the wall.

The boys learned from Alyosha that Dorogomilov was threatened with eviction. In addition to having witnessed the battle between Arseni Romanovich and Zubinsky, Alyosha had overheard an important conversation between his mother and father. This conversation concerned a secret which Arseni Romanovich had confided to Alyosha's father, and in respect to this secret the name of Ragozin had been mentioned. Someone had been chasing this Ragozin, and Arseni Romanovich had hid him. Now Ragozin was in a position to protect Arseni Romanovich from Zubinsky, but Arseni Romanovich would hear nothing of it. Herein lay the key to the mystery.

Pavlik Parabukin ordered Alyosha to keep his mouth shut, but he himself got busy. He asked his father who Ragozin was. On the next day he told Vitya that he was the most important of all the commissars.

"The most important!" mocked Vitya. "There's more important ones than him!"

"No there isn't!" said Pavlik, "because he's in charge of all the money. He can do anything he wants."

"He can not! The Military Commissar's most important, because he has to do the fighting."

"Aren't you smart! You think they're handing out guns for nothing? And who's got the money?"

They argued for some time, but finally decided to go together to this Ragozin to seek aid for Arseni Romanovich. Pavlik concluded that Ragozin was to be found in the bank. Where else? Obviously his headquarters would be where the money was kept.

He led Vitya to Theatre Square. The fashionable side was lined with commercial bank buildings. The façades had become neglected—there were more important things to think about those days than washing coloured tiles or polishing entrance doors.

After the October Revolution the banks were nationalized. The process was a slow one. The banks sabotaged and evaded carrying out the Soviet policy, seeking various means of hiding everything of real value in order to speed the depreciation of the huge mass of paper money being printed.

Only the victor on three fronts could become master of the country. These fronts were the war front, the bread front, and the money front. Machinations on the money front were carried on quietly but uninterruptedly, their vicious influence rising like a river to flood the cellars and palaces of the capital, stop the work of the factories, and

undermine the huts in the villages. Vital arteries were becoming clogged, ligaments weakened, joints stiffened. Intercourse was being paralyzed, causing the death of all activity. This was the threat to the revolution represented by the quiet money front.

In financial affairs, the banks had a thousand years of experience behind them. The weapons they used were subtle and pliant. Their poisons acted instantaneously or slowly, according to the need. Since the very outset of the revolution, no institution had simulated virtue so effectively as the banks. Their activities were carried on under the banner of the struggle against speculation in gold and foreign currency, and the more convincing this disguise, the more flourishing the speculation.

The network of banks in Russia was very extensive, and the threads of foreign banks were closely interwoven. The nationalization of the banks immediately made itself felt in foreign policy. It was not enough to simply announce that all bank capital was now state property. It was necessary to prevent the freezing of this capital and its transference to foreign countries. For this reason, the nationalization tactics of the central government were not always understood in the provinces and outlying districts. Furthermore, bank officials

in the capital kept ceaselessly setting snares throughout the entire country.

Saratov was stifled by a shortage of money. All sources of taxation in the gubernia had already been exhausted. The only hope lay in the printing press. But however the issuance of new currency was simplified (to the extent that bills became like streetcar tickets and were justly dubbed "money signs"), the presses could not cope with the demand. The banks on Theatre Square did all in their power to prevent the finding of money, and at last the city authorities decided to force the situation: they created a commission called the Initiative Commission into whose hands the administration of all banks was unexpectedly transferred. This created a quiet but profound sensation on the quietest of all fronts. The commercial banks ceased to exist.

At the moment in question, one year after this event, the finances of the city were feeling even more sharply the shattering shock of the times, even though their management was now concentrated in one hand. The firmness of this hand grew in proportion to the difficulty with which money was found for carrying on the war and reorganizing life. For that reason, all eyes were turned to Pyotr Petrovich Ragozin. They knew his hand and trusted it.

When his candidacy for the position was put forward at a meeting of the Executive Committee and it was stated that the city and the gubernia were facing a financial crisis, Ragozin could say only that he had already refused the position of Finance Commissar for the simple reason that he understood nothing about money matters, and that he was suspicious of double-entry bookkeeping just because it was two-faced. They quieted his fears by replying that he would not be called Commissar, but simply Head of the Finance Department. He asked with a smile whether it was possible to run that department without understanding anything about money. To which they replied that his advantage over specialists in finance lay in the fact that he was quite capable of learning finance, but had no need of learning honesty. Kirill Izvekov was present at this meeting; he said not a word. After Ragozin had been persuaded to accept the position, Kirill glanced at him out of the corner of his eye and raised a hand to hide a smile when Ragozin shot him a thunderous look.

Ragozin could not have refused. During the ten years in which he had been a member of the Party, the ruling concept of his life had been the fact that he was a Bolshevik and belonged to the collective will, which gave meaning to his entire

existence. Any responsibility which he accepted he executed as a duty which became a habit.

But when he first undertook his new task he realized that never before had he come into contact with a world so chaotic and difficult to subordinate to the human will. As was his custom, Pyotr Petrovich began his work by making a plan which should enable him to concentrate on major tasks, without becoming lost in details. There were three major tasks: the checking of how capital was being confiscated; the checking of how valuables were being safeguarded, with an eye to evacuating them when the fighting drew too near the city; and finally the achieving of order in the distribution of money appropriations.

Scarcely had he made the acquaintance of his staff, when he was swamped by countless applicants for urgent appropriations. Money was bread, and it was impossible to refuse bread to the starving. But the only thing which poured lavishly from the twenty offices supervised by Ragozin was the word "No."

His entire day was taken up by answering requests and demands. His reception room swarmed with owners of stocks and shares on a modest scale: small lawyers, officials, teachers, owners of suburban homes, family doctors. According to the law, all of them were entitled to remuneration for

confiscated bonds if the sum did not exceed ten thousand rubles.

Suddenly his office would be stormed by a sobbing actress who sat wiping her mascara-smeared eyes and insisting that the estimate of the valuables found in her safe-deposit box had been unfair. Both pairs of earrings had been genuine diamonds, whereas the list stated that one pair was paste. Never would she have put paste diamonds in a safe-deposit box. She needed her imitation jewelry almost every evening for the stage, and she kept it here, in this morocco-leather box—just look, Comrade Commissar: four bracelets, two pins, rings, earrings—no counting them all! She didn't claim that they were diamonds! But in her safe-deposit box she had put nothing but real diamonds of the purest water! The pair of earrings in question had been presented to her by admirers at her last benefit performance. The entire troupe could testify to this. It was not her fault if benefit performances had been stopped and she could never hope to receive such gifts again. She had to live. Her safe-deposit box contained only her honest earnings. No extravagance, no luxury, but the hard-earned income of an actress. At the bank they had either substituted paste diamonds for the real ones, or had wilfully misrepresented what was there for the sake of

some swindle. She was no schoolgirl. You could not deceive her. She demanded that a committee of experts investigate her case. She would rather die than have anyone think she had been presented with paste diamonds. Thank goodness her admirers were none of your Germans!

Or perhaps Ragozin would be cornered for a good hour by the head of the Health Department, a highly respected woman who was an experienced doctor. There was no resisting the power of her arguments, and it was all Pyotr Petrovich could do to counter them. He knew that she was right, but he was also right: she needed money because the government demanded that she look after the public health, but Ragozin had no money because the government could not produce it as fast as circumstances demanded. To be sure, the presses were adapting themselves to the times. Notes which yesterday bore the figure 10, today bore the figure 1000, and tomorrow would show another three zeros. But market prices kept up with the presses like hounds after a hare, and no twisting and turning could help the hare escape. Ragozin listened to the chorus of his twenty offices singing in unison: "No!"

"But just put yourself in my place," pleaded the doctor. "We can't hope to get any money from the central government. We applied there and

were told that all permanent medical organizations must be supported by local funds, without a kopek from the central government. How do you expect us to keep our hospitals going? We manage to keep alive only because they send us something for war prisoners, military wards, and the fight against cholera. We turn the sick away. We have no blankets. We have no slippers. They appoint a special commission to inspect our work and the commission says: 'Why are there no pillows?' Where am I supposed to get them? I'm not a financier; I'm a doctor, and I don't know how to manufacture money. They tell us we mustn't let the refugees die. But if I transfer money from one account to another in order to cure cholera with money designated for typhus, they threaten to take me to court. Whose fault is it that cholera broke out before the typhus epidemic was over? If you could only see what a time we're having! And you say that we Communist doctors are sabotaging!"

"Oh no we don't," said Ragozin reproachfully. "I couldn't possibly say that. I only say you've got to stir yourselves and draw up estimates indicating where the money's coming from."

"Estimates won't bring back the dead. It's money we need. Right now. This very minute. The outskirts of the city are wallowing in filth. Four years ago we could properly clean up only one-

fifth of the city, and then we had four hundred barrels for collecting refuse. Do you know how many we had last summer? Sixty-seven! And now? Twenty! Have you ever thought about that?"

"About the barrels? Hm, seems to me they're not exactly in my line," said Ragozin, slightly offended.

"We need money for the barrels, and you're the money. Am I talking to the right person or not? I want to place a tax on the population for medical and sanitary needs."

"You can't do that."

"Why not? Didn't the financial commission of the Soviet make a levy on the rich last year, before your time? The merchants began fighting among themselves as to who should pay what. The richer ones tried to push the brunt of the burden onto those who had less, and finally they came to the Soviet asking that the amount each was to pay be definitely specified."

"Had a regular fist fight, did they?" asked Ragozin cheerfully.

"I don't know about that, but I do know that the levy brought in a sizable sum which went for improving the conditions of the Red Army. Why can such money be raised for the Red Army, and not for medical purposes?"

"It's illegal to make levies any more—been a law passed against it," answered Ragozin almost regretfully.

Thus he went on talking and talking for days on end, often seeking a way out where none was to be found, like a person who knows that he has not a kopek left, yet keeps fumbling mechanically through his pockets.

In moments of respite Ragozin would stretch himself and glance through the window at a spot of river shining between the housetops, thinking to himself that he would probably never again go on an overnight fishing trip. And scarcely would he have time to give a sigh of longing when the door would open and someone would announce that a representative from the Department of Public Education, or Social Maintenance, or some other organization was waiting to see him, and once more he would take his place behind his desk, while the thought flashed through his mind that actually he was no longer a human being at all—just a sort of animated bank note.

"All right," he would say aloud. "Let them at me. Who's first?..."

Naturally the two boys who were standing in front of the handsome entrance on Theatre Square had not the faintest idea of the history of the nationalization of the banks or of the work and

anxieties of Ragozin. For a long time they could not make up their minds to open the door, which, in spite of its tarnished brass, seemed very imposing. The more enterprising Pavlik poked Vitya in the ribs and said:

"What are you waiting for? Come on!"

They found themselves faced by a wide stairway covered with a shabby, but still impressive red carpet with a striped border. Everything was quiet except for the click of the abacuses coming from the second floor, sounding like the dripping of rain off the roof.

Through a glass door to one side came an old man with a blue-white beard to his waist. In one hand he held a tin teakettle with steam curling from the spout, and in the other an empty saucer.

"What are you doing here?"

"We've come to see Comrade Ragozin," said Pavlik.

"So that's what you want!"

The old man poured some hot water in the saucer and began to blow on it. After a few sips he asked:

"What do you want to see him for?"

"We were sent to him," answered Vitya.

"Where did they send you?"

Vitya glanced at Pavlik.

"They sent us here," said Pavlik.

The old man finished the first saucerful and poured out a second.

"This is the Volga-Kama Commercial Bank," he said, studying the boys' feet. "When you enter a place like this, you want to wipe the dust off your feet, and not come in like it was a shed. There's never been anybody named Ragozin here since the day it was built."

"Then where is he?" asked Pavlik.

"Who is he, that Ragozin of yours?"

For a while the boys were silent, then Vitya answered:

"He's the chief."

The old man faced them with his bearded breast and opened his arms with the teakettle in one hand and the saucer in the other:

"I'll let you have the feel of this hot water, that's what I'll do, and then maybe you won't go poking in your noses where they don't belong!"

Vitya and Pavlik backed up to the door.

"The chief!" cried the old man, crawling up on them. "Everybody's a chief nowadays. Go look for him where the chiefs sit."

"Where's that?" asked Pavlik, already at the door.

"The chiefs sit at the Soviet! Scoot!"

"What a crank!" said Pavlik when the heavy door had slowly closed behind them. "But I know where the Soviet is."

"So do I. Let's run."

And off they went.

Ragozin was used to receiving all kinds of visitors, but still he had never expected to have children coming to his office. He was sure they had come by mistake, but the sight of their flushed faces and parted lips put him in a cheerful mood. He got up and studied them in silence, smiling and pulling at his moustache.

"Are you Comrade Ragozin?" asked Pavlik as softly as possible.

"Let's say that I am."

"No, tell us the truth, because they said out there you were in here."

"So I am. Don't you believe your own eyes?"

"But are you Comrade Ragozin?"

"Don't I look like him?"

"We don't know," said Vitya, "because we've never seen you before."

"Well, now you see him. Do I look like him?"

Pavlik swept Ragozin from head to foot with a serious gaze and said convincingly:

"Yes you do." He stepped back a bit and whispered to the back of Vitya's head:

"You tell him."

"We've come to you from Arseni Romanych, Comrade Ragozin."

"Not from Arseni Romanych," interrupted Pavlik, again stepping forward, "because Arseni Romanych doesn't know we came."

"No, Arseni Romanych doesn't know, but we've come about Arseni Romanych," explained Vitya.

"And who might Arseni Romanych be?"

Both the boys looked at Ragozin in surprise.

"Yes, who is he, and why didn't you tell him you were coming to see me?"

"Don't you really know Arseni Romanych?" asked Vitya in a scarcely audible voice.

"Who is he?"

"Arseni Romanych? He's Dorogomilov."

Ragozin jumped up and walked out into the middle of the room.

"Dorogomilov?" he repeated, rubbing his bald spot furiously. "Arseni Romanovich Dorogomilov? Is he here?"

"No, he's not here," Pavlik hastened to put in. "He's at work. We didn't tell him because he wouldn't come to you for anything in the world, so we came by ourselves, Vitya and me."

"Why wouldn't he come to see me? What has happened to him?"

"Nothing yet. But we're afraid, because some soldier came and said he was going to put him

out of his apartment, with his books and everything."

"With his books!" almost shouted Ragozin. "You don't say! But that means he's still alive? And living in that same place—with his books? Well, well!"

He grabbed one chair, then a second and a third, and placed them in a row, after which he sat the boys on the end chairs and took the middle one himself.

"Well, fellows, tell me everything, from the very beginning."

There was nothing more for them to tell—their entire case had been stated. They simply did not want any harm to come to Arseni Romanovich. However, they were familiar with every nail in the old house where Dorogomilov lived, and could tell Ragozin anything he wanted to know about Arseni Romanovich. And the more they talked, the more vividly Ragozin remembered how he had sat on that divan among the bookshelves silently leafing through worn pages, or helping the untidy, always slightly excited old man wash the dishes. With an oilcloth apron over his frock coat and a sponge in his hand, he would criticize the French social utopias with such vigour that one might think they had long been set up on this earth and had done him personal injury. Ragozin vividly

remembered Dorogomilov's queer figure in a soft hat and frock coat silhouetted on the riverbank against the purple haze of the dawn. Ragozin was seated in a rowboat, pushing himself noiselessly past the assembled wherries and skiffs to the open river, and when he had already guided his boat under the piles and was pushing around the tar-sticky end of the pier, he turned for a last look at this silhouette waving the soft hat above his head like a living beacon. Then Ragozin had been carried down the Volga on a journey into the unknown, leaving behind him everything he loved—his Ksana, who was expecting a child, his old friends, the sleeping city encircled by a horseshoe of hills. . . .

"Just think! The same old Arseni Romanovich!" he exclaimed as he listened to the boys.

The minute they had entered his office, Ragozin had felt his heart leap. He was most attracted by Pavlik, the cheerful little redhead with his flashing eyes and sensitive pug nose. Ragozin kept turning to him and exclaiming "Just think!", while secretly he wondered if this youngster resembled the little Ragozin whom he would surely begin to search for and would surely find as soon as he had brought a semblance of order into his work.

"How old are you?" he asked Pavlik.

"Eleven. I'm older than Vitya."

"Older than Vitya," mused Ragozin, "and older than another little boy."

"Who?"

"A certain little boy... something like you," laughed Ragozin.

He placed his hand on Pavlik's shoulder and squeezed it slightly, noting its childish fragility and the prominence of the collarbone. After a moment's silence he stood up, having the boys do so as well, and replaced the chairs.

"All right, friends; you can tell Arseni Romanych not to worry—nobody will put him out. And if anyone attempts it, come right to me. Incidentally, tell him to come too. Say I want to see him. But if he gets stubborn and won't come, then I'll go to see him."

He took their four hands in his and gave them such a vigorous shake that the boys began to laugh.

When he had closed the door after them he sat down on the window sill and gazed out at the town. The roofs and the tops of the trees were etched with dazzling sun, while the sky blazed mercilessly.

"No," he said out loud as he left the window. "It's clear I'll never see another fishing trip. Never. A lot of time I've got for fishing!"

Pavlik remarked as he walked briskly down the corridor:

"Just let anyone try to touch Arseni Roman-
nych now!"

"Just let them try!" repeated Vitya. "They'll
get it all right!"

They ran down the busy stairway, now parting
with each other, now coming together as they
avoided bumping into the people ascending. At
the very door they were stopped by hearing some-
one cry "Vitya!", and they almost ran into
Merkuri Avdeyevich.

Meshkov grabbed his grandson by the sleeve:

"What are you doing here?"

"We... that is..." faltered Vitya, turning
to Pavlik for aid.

"We came to see ... I mean Arseni Roman-
nych sent us ... to Room 40," replied Pavlik bel-
ligerently, pulling Vitya toward him as though to
take him under his protection.

"Room 40?"

Merkuri Avdeyevich wiped his perspiring
brow.

"Well, what's he like?" he asked.

"Who?" asked Vitya.

"It's Ragozin who sits in Room 40, isn't it?
What's he like? Not bad?" asked Meshkov cau-
tiously.

"Not bad?" exclaimed Vitya rapturously.
"That's a fine thing to say!"

"Is he mean?"

"He's the best man in the world!" said Vitya with growing courage.

"He won't let anybody in he doesn't want," said Pavlik.

"Innocent babes! What wouldn't I give to be in your place!" sighed Merkuri Avdeyevich. "Get along wherever you're going, Pavlik, and you come along with me, grandson."

"What for?"

"To show me that Room 40. And wait for me until I come out . . . if I ever come out. . . ."

He took Vitya by the hand.

Once in the waiting room, he took off the straw hat whose original tan had become violet, and handed it to Vitya. He wanted to ask the boy some more questions, but his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth from heat and excitement, and he was unable to take his eyes off the door that was soon to swallow him up. Vitya was bored.

"Grandad, I want to go home," he complained.

But his grandfather only shook his head and squeezed the boy's fingers to indicate that he should stop twisting the hat.

Finally someone called out a name which sounded amazingly unfamiliar:

"Citizen Meshkov."

He jumped up and set off weak-kneed to the door. At the threshold he made a deep bow in the direction of the desk. He had thought that out beforehand: it wouldn't kill him, and if Ragozin recognized him the bow might be to his advantage: "Just see how Meshkov's come down off his high horse!" If he failed to recognize him, it might be to his advantage anyway: "Just look how well-bred those dogs of merchants are!"

"Please take a seat," he heard someone say, and was amazed at the respect and politeness in the tone. His ears must be deceiving him.

Ragozin watched Meshkov with detachment, as though all his efforts were concentrated on putting aside intruding thoughts. But his eyes were bright beneath his knitted brows. He knew who was sitting in front of him. In an effort to break through the financial tangle, he was trying to lay the three main roads marked on his plan, like roads through the taiga. To guide the course of events was also his duty and his habit. He was not one to drift with the current. He either cut across it or boldly steered against it. In glancing through the list of those who had rented safe-deposit boxes, he had come across the name of Meshkov, and remembering his solid, though not very extensive business, he summoned him among the first

in order to check up on what had become of his former wealth.

"He's not what he used to be, not at all," thought Ragozin as he looked at Meshkov's pinched face and neglected appearance.

"You and I are acquainted," he said without any ceremony.

"You don't say!" exclaimed Merkuri Avdeyevich.

"Don't you remember Pyotr Petrovich, who rented that little house in your yard?"

"Pyotr Petrovich? Dear me! Can it really be you?"

Meshkov raised his hands in such a way that the right one hovered above the desk, pointing in the general direction from which Ragozin's hand would rise if the latter showed any tendency to lift it. For a second Merkuri Avdeyevich froze in the pose of a planing bird, waiting to see whether his old acquaintance would wish to shake hands with him or not, and was just about to fold his wings when Ragozin leaned forward and gave the old man's fingers a brief clasp. Evidently Ragozin was a friendly sort of a chap after all. And he had a very winning manner of speaking.

"Hm, just look what's happened. Times change, don't they?"

"The veriest truth, Pyotr Petrovich. Times change. But thank the Lord you seem to be getting on all right. We thought that you . . . that you..."

"Did you really give me a thought?" asked Ragozin with subtle sarcasm as he twisted up one side of his moustache. "Just what did you think about me?"

"My late wife and I often spoke about you. 'There was a good man for you, that Pyotr Petrovich,' we'd say. 'A just man indeed.'"

"So your wife died, did she?" asked Ragozin casually, adding: "So did mine."

"You don't say!" marvelled Meshkov. "Such a fine woman! We were so worried about her that time!"

"Worried about her?" asked Ragozin.

"Yes, of course. After all, she was with child when they took her. Should have presented you with an heir. Maybe the child was born, have you heard?"

"No, I haven't," replied Ragozin slowly, but suddenly his voice became brusque and matter-of-fact, as though another person were speaking: "I have summoned you in order to enquire about your wealth. The Finance Department is interested in knowing the total amount of your property."

"Interested?" said Meshkov almost playfully. "What's there to be interested in? I have no more wealth."

"Didn't you keep your papers in a safe-deposit box?"

"Yes. In the Volga-Kama Bank."

"At the time of the confiscation I think you were found to have bonds to the amount of two hundred and twenty thousand rubles?"

"Two hundred and twenty-one thousand, five hundred."

"And you claim that this was your entire capital?"

"Yes, this was my entire capital."

"But you also had a store. A hardware store, if I am not mistaken, at the Upper Bazaar. Where did the money invested in these bonds come from?"

"From the store."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I sold the store and bought the bonds."

Meshkov seemed hurt and offended. He was disappointed that the conversation had been switched from themes promising to place him on good terms with Ragozin, and the mention of the loss of his property only served to further aggravate him.

"Please don't mind my butting into your affairs," said Ragozin with a smile, as though reading Meshkov's thoughts, "but I shall have to ask you to give me a greater share of your confidence."

"They've taken everything from me, down to my last undershirt. What else is there to share?"

"Not so harsh, not so harsh," said Ragozin softly.

"Go ahead and ask me questions, Pyotr Petrovich; I won't refuse to answer. But no one can say it's me who's being harsh."

"I understand. But you must realize that I didn't summon you here for reproaches. Tell me just what your property consisted of, in money, real estate, and goods. Exactly. Everything will be verified."

"Just as you say" consented Meshkov. "I have nothing to hide. As you remember, business was bad in 1916, and it didn't look as though there would be any recovery. For that reason I decided to get rid of my store, and soon sold it. I got more for it than I had expected—one hundred and eighty thousand rubles. But that was because money was already worth less than before the war. A bit earlier I had sold a lodginghouse to a merchant, and the flour and rope warehouse I owned, if you remember, was all falling to pieces; I sold

it to wreckers for the price of the old lumber. Before that I had no cash at all, nothing but property. But as you see, just before the revolution I turned everything into money."

"And where did you keep it? In the bank?" asked Ragozin.

"Yes."

"You also owned a city lot, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. But it was only a lot—no buildings on it. And now that all land belongs to the state, I don't have even the lot."

"What about your own house?"

"What about it, Pyotr Petrovich? It's been taken over by the city."

"Nothing was found in your safe-deposit box but Liberty Bonds. Do you mean to say that before the revolution you turned all your property into money, and then put all that money into one loan?"

"All of it, to the last kopek," sighed Meshkov, wiping his face as though he had just come out of a steam bath.

"Why were you so imprudent as to sink it all in one loan?"

"I'll tell you why, Pyotr Petrovich. I fell a victim to flattery. I was shown such respect that I lost my head. The director of the bank talked me into thinking that he and I were the only

practical, farsighted businessmen in the city. The first revolution was supposed to be followed by victory over the Germans, and then there would be a big boom. The Liberty Loan would be sound, and no other bonds, to say nothing of currency, would be able to compare with it. The director and I would stand firm as Gibraltar on the interest from the Liberty Loan. Well, here's your Gibraltar for you!"

"So you miscalculated on your Liberty Loan?" smiled Ragozin. "Kerensky let you down?"

"You're the best judge of who let me down. I'm not much good at politics."

There was a moment's silence. Suddenly Ragozin said very softly, but distinctly:

"I am rather good at politics. . . . Are you sure you had no gold?"

He looked Meshkov straight in the eye.

Merkuri Avdeyevich shrugged his shoulders:

"You can rip up my mattresses if you like. You're the boss."

"Humph," said Ragozin, getting up. "Why should I rip up your mattresses? But the bank books are in our hands, and from them we shall learn whether everything was as you claim. I shall not detain you for the present."

Meshkov had already started to get up, and he interrupted the movement to ask:

"But later—will you detain me?"

"Why should I, if you have answered all my questions truthfully?"

"On my honour, Pyotr Petrovich! I couldn't keep anything from you anyway. You know all about me: how much rent I charged, and my house and my store. And why should I try to hide anything? You never treated me bad, and I always had a soft spot in my heart for you."

"All right," nodded Ragozin.

"That's the honest truth. I never said a word against you. And if you ever knew what I suffered from the secret police after they discovered my house was a centre for underground activities and you were nowhere to be found..."

"You suffered? From the secret police?" interrupted Ragozin with a burst of laughter. "Because of a sinner like me? You poor fellow!"

He roared with laughter, now pushing himself away from the desk with his fists, now leaning over it, while tears of merriment glistened in the slits of his eyes.

"Looks like I also—I also let you down," he gasped. "Not only—Kerensky!"

Tears gleamed in Meshkov's eyes too, but the blood drained from his face, leaving it a ghastly yellow, and he remained standing all hunched over, his lifted brows bereft of their former fierceness.

At this moment someone knocked at the door and Ragozin cried:

"Come in!... That's one thing I never thought of, but it seems I let you down all the same! No denying it!"

He was still laughing when two men and a girl entered. The men were carrying their coats over their arms and were wearing narrow belts, like tennis players; the girl had on a white blouse and a short plaid skirt. It seemed as though they brought in with them a goodly portion of the brightness of out-of-doors, so gay were the shirts the men were wearing (one of them pale blue, the other peach colour), and even their clean-shaven faces seemed to be peculiarly alight. Their manner of bowing and walking over to the desk expressed diffidence and self-assurance in the most correct proportions. "Handsome brutes," thought Ragozin, still laughing. When he had sobered down he turned to Meshkov and said:

"But there's no denying I was easier on you than the Liberty Loan! Well, I guess that's about all for today."

Instead of rejoicing at his release, Merkuri Avdeyevich was annoyed that these visitors had prevented him from bringing his visit to a more cordial conclusion. Presently he heard the silky tones of a familiar voice:

"Actor Tsvetukhin," said the man in the blue shirt, adding as he pointed to the peach-coloured one: "Pastukhov." Then he touched the elbow of the girl and announced in lowered tones: "One of my pupils."

"I know," answered Ragozin, and offered them chairs, including the one at which Meshkov was still standing, as though the latter was not expected to occupy space.

A short pause ensued while they seated themselves. Merkuri Avdeyevich had to step aside in order to enable Pastukhov to sit down, and as he did so he plucked up the courage to ask:

"Don't you remember me?"

In a moment of frankness, Alexander Vladimirovich had once confessed to remembering only those who might some day prove useful to him. He actually had forgotten Meshkov. He blinked at him for a second and then turned to Ragozin, as though enquiring of what possible worth this seedy old fellow could be. Ragozin gave him no help.

"Goodbye," he said with a nod to Meshkov. "I shall send for you if I need you."

Meshkov bowed to Pyotr Petrovich, raised his head and pierced Pastukhov with a glance from under brows which had resumed their fierceness.

"The great and the small have all been levelled down these days," he said reproach-

fully. "Time to put your pride in your pocket. Take a hint from him" (indicating Ragozin with his brows). "He's a bit more important than you...."

Suddenly the girl went over to him.

"How do you do, Merkuri Avdeyevich," she said. "Forgive me for not recognizing you before. I'm Anna Parabukina."

He mumbled something to himself as though suddenly gone hoarse, and timidly took the girl's slender fingers in his paw. Tsvetukhin immediately greeted him, while Pastukhov nodded in some embarrassment. All of them followed him with their eyes as he walked unsteadily to the door.

"Well, Comrade Ragozin," said Tsvetukhin impressively, "we've come to you about a very important matter. We met Alexander Vladimirovich on the way, and I invited him to be our ally."

"I'm ready to hear whatever you have to say."

"Allow me to take the bull by the horns, so to speak, without any introductions."

"Go ahead."

"You see, I have organized a dramatic studio in the city which...."

At that moment the door was thrown open and Kirill Izvekov shouted from the waiting room:

"Pyotr Petrovich, could you step into my office for a second?"

"You step in here; see who's come to see me," answered Ragozin, with a sweep of his hand toward his visitors.

But Kirill had already recognized them and was entering the room.

"A regular club meeting," he observed, hiding a smile with his hand as he went toward Annochka.

Tsvetukhin watched to see how Annochka would greet Izvekov: schoolgirl habits made it difficult for her to remain sitting when approached by someone older than herself, but this time she restrained herself, though with an effort, and perhaps for that reason the feminine grace with which she extended her hand seemed a bit exaggerated.

Tsvetukhin said to Pastukhov:

"This is Comrade Izvekov, who was just a little boy back in the old days, remember?"

"Oh, not such a very little boy," said Kirill casually as he walked over to Ragozin. "What's on your mind?"

"Rumours seem to be circulating that I have horns," said Ragozin with a smile. "They've come to take me by them."

Tsvetukhin accepted the joke as encouragement.

"Maybe the three of us can manage it," he said. "And perhaps Comrade Izvekov will help."

We've come about our studio. I suppose you have no difficulty guessing what we're asking for."

"I don't know about Comrade Izvekov, but I have no difficulty at all."

"I suppose not," smiled Tsvetukhin. "Everybody probably comes to you asking for big sums. But we actors are used to walking the rails—we're a modest lot."

Ragozin held out his hand:

"Did you bring an estimate with you?"

"We'll make out an estimate the minute we get the first appropriation. We've just come to discuss in principle the possible sum..."

"So that's what you want!" laughed Ragozin without allowing Tsvetukhin to finish his sentence. "Want us to put down the money, and then you'll decide what to do with it, eh? What's the matter, haven't you enough money even to finance an estimate? Doesn't your studio come under the administration of the Art Department?"

"No, we're independent, as it were. Or rather our studio belongs to the Red Army Club, and is therefore part of the administration of the local garrison."

"But the Red Army has its own funds. Why have you come to me?"

"The fact is..." began Egor Pavlovich, but again Ragozin interrupted.

"What do you do in that studio of yours?"

"It's a dramatic studio."

"But just exactly what do you do there?"

"Naturally we—act," replied Tsvetukhin with an offended shrug of his shoulders.

"That's clear. But for whom? For what purpose?"

"For whom? Obviously for the audience... so that the audience... I must make it clear that as a studio, our main purpose is educational. But..."

"Educational in respect to the audience? Is that it?"

"That goes without saying. But first we have to teach and train future actors—here, for example, is one of our actresses..."

Tsvetukhin glanced at Annochka, less to indicate the sort of actresses they were training, than to solicit her aid.

Pastukhov, who at first had remained detached and a bit aloof, began to take interest and to wonder what all this would lead to. He kept watching Egor Pavlovich, apparently amused that the latter had met with a rebuff.

"But don't you receive money from the club?"

"The club is willing to pay for the ordinary work of a dramatic circle. But we need money to pay the actors, and to carry on our work in general."

"But I understood that you worked not with actors, but with students. What talk can there be of salaries? Or maybe you mean the salaries of those in charge?"

Tsvetukhin got up. He resolved that he would make them listen to him. He looked very impressive.

"I must explain to you our major purposes. They are revolutionary purposes, and I am sure you will approve of them."

He cast Pastukhov an angry glance for maintaining the position of a mere observer.

"My basic idea is the creation of a revolutionary theatre. What do I mean by that? An actor brings to his performance just what his audience brings. The audience and the actor are one and the same. If the audience has dreams and aspirations, the actor enjoys flights of the imagination. If the audience is oppressed by the cares of daily life, the actor crawls along on his belly. If the audience is aflame with irrepressible emotion, the actor will have moments of ecstasy. In order to give full rein to this harmony between actor and audience, it is essential that the theatre be emancipated from all tradition. We declare ourselves the enemies of all convention and routine, of everything that is out of date. The huge theatres that have become anchored in the earth have long

since become prisons of art, rather than its temples. They are enchained by tradition. We wish to release art from its prison and restore it to its temple. We shall remove the chains from the hands and feet of the actor. Our temples will be mobile. Our actor will be in perpetual motion. He will be the mirror of life. At present the world is engulfed in flame, and it is no time for theatres to be staging domestic dramas. Our purpose is to create a spiritual storm on the stage that will reflect the storm of passions raging in our life."

Tsvetukhin sealed his mouth with his lower lip and sat down, but seated he gave the impression of standing, so straight and expansive had he become.

"A bit abstract," said Ragozin gently. "Just how do you give practical expression to all this?"

"Our practical work is born of our convictions," continued Tsvetukhin in the same lofty vein. "And our convictions are rooted in youth" (here he made a gesture towards Annochka). "We professional actors teach youth only technique. But youth teaches us the main thing—its belief in life and the revolution."

"Are you also a part of this studio?" Izvekov suddenly asked Pastukhov.

Alexander Vladimirovich paused before answering, as though wishing to separate his words from all that had preceded.

"No. I am a newcomer," he said at last. "I had nothing to do with the founding of the studio. But I am somewhat familiar with the ideas on which it is based."

"And do you also support them?"

"I agree that Egor Pavlovich was rather abstract in his exposition. Practically speaking, the project under discussion is merely a new travelling theatre. It seems to me the idea warrants support. However, I don't find that it represents any menace to the poor old traditional theatre."

"You'll see!" observed Tsvetukhin aggressively.

"That is my personal opinion. But I have no desire to raise any objections. On the contrary, I am heartily in favour of . . . er . . . this promising innovation, especially since it is headed by so talented a person as Egor Pavlovich. But I repeat that I don't find anything revolutionary about the idea of such a theatre."

"Oh, of course we can't hope to compete with you in matters of revolution," muttered Tsvetukhin bitingly, catching himself when it was too late, for Izvekov took advantage of his words to remark:

"Yes, I read the article. It seems you took part in the revolution. To what party did you belong?"

Again Alexander Vladimirovich paused impressively:

"I have never belonged to any party."

"But you took part in underground work?"

"No," said Pastukhov decisively.

"A cock and bull story?" asked Izvekov.

Pastukhov's face fell. But as he sought for a means of turning the conversation, he noticed the remorse on Egor Pavlovich's face, and quickly passed his hand over his lips to wipe away the signs of his own displeasure.

"Embryonic cock and bull," he replied with a noiseless laugh. "Exaggeration. The secret police suspected me and Egor Pavlovich of having distributed your leaflets, Comrade Ragozin. That's all. It seems you printed leaflets?"

"And were you arrested?" asked Ragozin in his turn.

"No. We escaped with nothing more than a cross-examination."

"But at least you were made to suffer?"

To everyone's surprise, Ragozin suddenly burst out laughing. He laughed until the tears rolled down his cheeks, and his laughter was so infectious that soon Annochka began to giggle and everybody smiled.

"What a day!" he said with a shake of his head. "I'm always being visited by people who have suffered from Ragozin, but today everyone who has come seems to have suffered *for* Ragozin. That terrible Ragozin!"

Then he said to Kirill:

"You're the only one, it seems, who has not suffered either from me, or for me."

"That's right," agreed Kirill, turning to Pastukhov:

"Don't you really find anything revolutionary about the work of the studio?"

"Nothing," said Pastukhov vengefully. "The usual amateur dramatic circle. The same curtain, the same props. Only they don't have a theatre of their own to act in."

"A fine ally you picked!" laughed Ragozin again, squinting at Tsvetukhin.

"Unfortunately, I was mistaken," observed Egor Pavlovich testily.

"I promised to support your request for money, not your principles."

"Alexander Vladimirovich!" burst out An-nochka, obviously deeply hurt. "It would be better if you kept quiet!" She strained forward with her fists clenched, as though battling to keep herself from jumping up. Kirill glanced at her and went quickly over to the window, from

where he watched Pastukhov, who now let himself go:

"Why should I keep quiet if my opinion is asked? I have pondered questions of art at least as long as Egor Pavlovich, and I certainly have a right to express my opinion. Egor Pavlovich talks about perpetual motion and the mirror of life. But perpetual motion exists only in the minds of moth-eaten inventors of *perpetuum mobile*, and as for the 'Mirror of Life'—that's the moving picture theatre where *Father Sergius* is being shown. . . . What are you showing in your theatre? Schiller? And you call that revolution? If it's revolution you want, then go out into the streets and onto the town square. Build some seventeenth century barges and have the followers of Stepan Razin go floating down the Volga while the people on the shore watch them hoist the tsar's emissaries in place of sails and drown those who have turned traitor to their band!"

"Will you write script for such a pageant?" asked Tsvetukhin.

"What have I to do with it? It's you who claim to be making a revolution in art. As for me, I hold that if there are talented actors, the audience will get along very nicely without any revolution."

"But why shouldn't you write a revolutionary play for the studio?" asked Izvekov. "I don't

doubt there are talented actors among its members."

"We have already asked Alexander Vladimirovich," said Annochka, turning to Kirill impulsively. "That would be wonderful!"

"Why not?" said Kirill, adopting her tone. "If we can convince Pyotr Petrovich to support the studio, there will be funds for making a decent production."

"There's your ally for you!" said Ragozin. "But don't think you can talk me into spending the people's money on a bird in the bush!"

Annochka quickly got up.

"But we're not birds in the bush. We're birds in the hand of Egor Pavlovich!"

"Not even birds in his hand can talk me into it!" smiled Ragozin.

"But it's all so simple!" cried Annochka, turning to Kirill for support. "You call us birds in the bush just because this arguing has led us heaven only knows where. Why waste time arguing about what may or may not come to pass in art at some future day? Everybody has his own view of the future. But take a look at what we have to offer right now, and then everything will be clear. Without undue modesty, we can say that we have already formed a new and original theatre."

"Do the Red Army men like your theatre?" asked Ragozin.

"Of course they do!"

"Will you go to the front with them?"

"Of course we will, won't we, Egor Pavlovich?"

"That's one of our aims," replied Tsvetukhin.

"I'm absolutely certain that if you once came to watch us rehearse, you would immediately give us the money."

"Don't worry, he'll give it to you," laughed Kirill.

"You got me into this job. Well, now I'm boss, and I'm not throwing any money to the winds," retorted Ragozin.

"Honest to goodness I had nothing to do with it. I just voted for you like everybody else did. . . . And it might be worth while looking into this studio business. Doesn't sound bad." Kirill came back to the desk. "But Comrade Pastukhov hasn't yet said whether he would write a revolutionary play or not."

"So far I have not been inspired with a suitable theme," replied Alexander Vladimirovich courteously.

"What if we suggest one?"

"Suggest a—subject?"

"Yes."

"Probably not suggest, but—order?"

"If you wish to put it that way."

"But an author's freedom lies in his choice of subject."

"We have no designs on your freedom. But couldn't you find something within the bounds of this freedom which would be suitable for the new theatre? After all, some people liked your former plays, didn't they?"

"The public liked them."

"I think it would not be a mistake to say that even then you depended on the people who liked your plays. The only difference is that now the public has changed."

"Do you wish to imply that now I am dependent on you?"

"Apparently, if your new plays please the new public."

"By making me dependent, you deprive me of my freedom."

"This applies first of all to your former customers, whom we have deprived of the freedom of making you dependent on them."

"By transferring this freedom to yourselves?"

"It belongs to us. This freedom is represented by our taste."

Pastukhov gave a slight shrug and began to speak in the pedantic tone in which one recites a fable with moral attached:

"Some ten years ago I was still a novice in art and spent my time going from one discussion group to another. One day a friend took me to a conference of the editorial staff of *The Golden Fleece*. The owner of the magazine was the millionaire Ryabushinsky, whom you have no doubt heard of. He was irritated by something or other and made a statement approximately like this: 'I am convinced that there is little difference between a writer and a prostitute. A writer is just as willing to sell himself to anybody who comes along, and will allow the highest bidder to do whatever he wants with him. . . .'"

"That bears out just what I was saying," interrupted Izvekov.

Pastukhov looked at Kirill searchingly as he said:

"Do you wish to imply that your views coincide with those of Ryabushinsky?"

"I wish to imply that we have emancipated you from the Ryabushinskys!"

"Thank you. Then please allow me to enjoy my emancipation."

"With pleasure," said Kirill, turning to Tsvetukhin. "That means that revolutionary art will have to struggle along without you. I think it will manage."

"So do I," put in Tsvetukhin with a vengeance.

"And I think that as long as we have such discussions, it is too soon to put money into the game," said Ragozin, getting up.

"Today may be too soon, but tomorrow may be too late," observed Kirill. "We have no right to refuse our support. It is necessary only to make clear who is with us and who is against us. We'll talk with the people at the club where the studio is located, and if it's only a matter of money, funds can be found. Would you mind stepping into my office for a minute, Pyotr Petrovich?"

He bowed as though his leave-taking were meant for Annochka alone, who was looking at him with serious, grateful eyes. On his way out he discovered that his collar had come unbuttoned, and he fumbled with it embarrassedly.

The goodbyes with Ragozin had not much warmth to them. Pastukhov was the first to leave the office. He retained an air of injury and aloofness and did not turn to his silent companions until they had reached the street.

There they came to a halt in the doorway, apart from the passers-by, and glanced at each other. Pastukhov said apologetically:

"Looks as though I had spoiled your career for you, Egor. Mine too. But don't lose heart. It's easy to make a career for yourself in wartime. And twice as easy in times of revolution."

"Do you really think that Egor Pavlovich is out to make a career?" exclaimed Annochka.

Pastukhov blinked into her youthful face flushed with indignation, then smiled stiffly as he said with exaggerated stress:

"Some kind of a career unquestionably. I know stage producers only too well. Come to your senses, my dear girl. They may promise you fame, but they demand a very high price for it!"

"You . . . it's filthy to think like that!" gasped Annochka, covering her eyes as though to shield them from some unbearable light.

"Do you know what you are?" shouted Tsvetukhin so that all the people could hear. "You're a scoundrel, that's what!"

They immediately turned in opposite directions, Egor Pavlovich taking Annochka by the arm.

* 16 *

The summer began ominously. Natives of Saratov, who were only too well acquainted with the caprices of this rich region, realized that the persistent winds presaged drought. Since the coming of spring there had been only one rain, which ran lightly over the surface without soaking in. The winds quickly dried up the moisture and a hard

crust formed over the earth. Soon the green hillsides turned grey, a sight which became more oppressive with every hour. The waters of the Volga fell, the sandbanks expanded and seemed to swell above the river.

Kirill glanced up at the sky as he left the house one Sunday morning. It was white, tinged with the faintest blue, and quivering at the horizon. Mirages appeared on the steppes beyond the Volga when the heat of the day was at its height. Suddenly one would see a pale green forest of poplars rising above the riverbank, separated from the earth by a band of shimmering light. One could not tell whether the forest grew on the riverbank or rose directly out of the water. The light kept shifting deceptively and the cool verdure lured the eyes.

The wind brought to Kirill's nostrils the faint odour of decaying fish. With every day the odour was becoming stronger. When the wind blew from the Volga the entire city, to the farthest house on the hills, became saturated with this odour.

Rumours spread that the herring, in swimming north, were jumping out of the water from the heat and shallowness and decaying on the sands. The fish appeared in unprecedented abundance, the head of the school extending as far north as

Khvalynsk, Syzran and the Samara Bend, while from below new schools kept coming, the fish floundering with exhaustion, dropping behind, dying on the way. The fisheries of the Lower Volga made no attempt to stop the migration, letting the vast hordes swim away to their own destruction. The Lower Volga had other things than fish to think of at this time.

At the beginning of summer the White army of the Armed Forces of South Russia began the most extensive drive against the Red Army which the civil war in the South had yet known. The volunteer forces of Denikin were moving along the roads to Kharkov. The command assigned a separate White corps to take the Crimea. Special volunteer detachments were to cut off the exit from the Crimea peninsula. Further east an army of Don Cossacks was advancing north against Donets groups of revolutionary forces. Wrangel was leading his Caucasian army over the Salsk steppes to Tsaritsyn. The forces of the North Caucasus had detailed units for the taking of Astrakhan. These six lines of advance fanned out over the entire South like a hand of cards held in the fist of Denikin's staff headquarters at Ekaterinodar. The opening of the drive was well coordinated, and never thereafter did the coalition of tsarist generals, landlords, bourgeoisie and Cossacks, experi-

ence such a unifying surge of joy and hope as at the beginning of that summer's bloody campaign.

The Red Army resisted Wrangel's attempt to take Tsaritsyn, and drove back the forces of the Caucasian army in an unexpected counterattack. In addition to the fact that Astrakhan sent reinforcements to Tsaritsyn, the city itself fought against the North Caucasus detachment of Terek Cossacks who were attacking the Volga delta in two columns, one crossing the steppes from Holy Cross, the other skirting the shore of the Caspian Sea from Kislyar. The roar of battle grew ever louder on the sun-blanchéd expanses of the Lower Volga. The quiet of peaceful activities became a thing of the past, and even the Volga fishermen ceased plying a trade that went back to time immemorial.

Kirill was ever conscious of the events of the war, but that morning the sultry wind from the Volga brought him an almost physical sensation of the vast spaces where the struggle was taking place. He went over in his mind all the news from the front that had been reported during the last few days. Although the work he was doing was a definite contribution to the struggle, he was oppressed by the feeling that he was isolated from events which were deciding the fate of the future.

At present this feeling was particularly strong within him.

But the wind brought still another sensation: Kirill was suddenly overwhelmed by a desire to go down to the Volga, to find some spot on an island, closer to that pungent odour of fish and water, where he could stretch out on the hot sand, give himself up to the harsh caress of the heat, listen to the shallow plashing of the waves, and feel the prickling of wind-blown sand on his body.

But Kirill had left his house with quite another intention. He had decided to visit Dibich in the convalescent home. This was not to be postponed, for it was uncertain when he might have another free moment for this purpose, besides which Dibich had sent him a note saying that he wanted to speak with him.

Kirill had arranged to have Dibich placed in one of the best convalescent army hospitals. In the four weeks of his stay there, Vasili Danilovich had so improved that he did not recognize himself in the mirror. His eyes had cleared and the inflammation had disappeared from the lids. His shaven face had become more genial, younger, and finer-featured. His voice rang clear and the dimple in his chin winked jovially when he laughed.

True, there were few occasions for laughter. Dibich lay in a small ward containing only four

beds. The occupants of two of them kept constantly changing. The patient in the third was a former officer now attached to regiment staff headquarters, who had been in the convalescent home almost as long as Dibich himself. He was a short man with purple pouches under his eyes, high colouring, and soft, restless hands. He was subject to frequent liver attacks, but between times he was very lively and eager to talk. He was constantly engaging Dibich in conversation, for he was a born arguer.

Dibich had learned much during his stay in the convalescent home. Everyone who came here had his own knowledge, accumulated during the revolution; and the knowledge of each individual merged to form the general knowledge of those who had lived through his period of trials and suffering. These people—orderlies, nurses, doctors, barbers, attendants, and men from the front—told Dibich things he had never known before, and little by little he filled in the blank spaces in his understanding resulting from the years spent as a war prisoner. Dibich did more listening than speaking. By slowly absorbing the electric charge of other people's thoughts (now vague, now clear; now cold, now impassioned; now resentful, now approving) he realized that each individual had paid such a high price for his point of view that it was as dear to him as though achieved through second birth.

At the end of the fourth week a new patient was brought into the ward—a steamer mechanic from Archangel, a man just over thirty, freckle-faced, with prominent cheekbones. Everything about him created the impression of solidity, from the ponderous gestures which he used sparingly, to his broad northern drawl. He had been injured when his unbelted blouse had caught in the cogs of a steam winch, resulting in a blow that left him unconscious. They kept him in an emergency hospital for two days and then sent him here. He said he had no mind to be landlubbing it for long. It was chance that had brought him to the Volga. In running away from the Whites in Archangel he had landed in Zaton, where ships belonging to the Volga War Fleet were repaired.

The fourth cot was vacant at this time. The three remained alone in the ward, and the staff officer kept pumping the northerner, asking who he was and what he was until he got the latter to talk.

"Have you ever taken the run to Murmansk?"

"Sure," drawled the sailor. "I was only a kid of ten when I first scrambled aboard a steamer, and there I've been ever since. When I was fifteen I was already stoking it. What seas haven't I crossed! What countries haven't I lived in!"

"Learn anything from living abroad?" asked the staff officer.

"Plenty. But I only just realized it. It all came clear on the last run from Murmansk to Archangel."

"How could you learn about life abroad while sailing Russian waters?"

"Easy enough. Russian boats in the North are flying the British flag these days."

"Well, what of it?"

"Here's what. The English spent the whole trip in the wardroom guzzling whiskey and smoking cigars, while our fellows—muzhiks and officers alike—were shut up in the hold along with some stinking fish from the moment we left Murmansk until we arrived in Archangel."

The staff officer gave a wave of his hand:

"Of course. The trouble is that some people would gladly spend a year in the hold along with some stinking fish if it meant getting rid of the Bolsheviks."

Dibich flushed, and struggled to take himself in hand before saying:

"I'd be willing to sit in the hold as long as you like in order to rip the foreign flags off our ships."

"To be sure," sighed the staff officer. "The trouble is that the European countries will never

agree to recognize the Soviets. According to them, the only way to come to power is through succession."

"They'll recognize any power that will pay them the tsar's debts, those European countries of yours," said Dibich.

"Why mine, I'd like to know? More yours than mine I'd say, once you spent so much time in Europe."

Dibich became silent. The sailor kept casting short glances at the two of them.

"I got a good look at those as would rather sit in the hold than join up with the Bolsheviks," he drawled. "A year ago the Whiteguards came out to give the English volunteers a big welcome on the banks of the Dvina. The troops stood snapped up to attention from one end of Archangel to the other. Chaikovsky's whole damn government came out on the bridge to hail them! 'Make yourselves to home, friends, make yourselves right to home!'"

"You say the English put all the Russians in the hold, regardless of rank?" said the staff officer, as though weighing the question in his own mind. "But we are the ones who have levelled ourselves down to one category. Here we are lying in the same ward, commanders and non-commanders. Europeans think that's the Russian way, so

they herd us all together. But I can hardly believe they made no distinction between men and officers."

"You can take my word for it," answered the sailor with exaggerated nonchalance. "I'm telling you what I saw with these lamps of mine. The English opened an artillery school for Whiteguard officers. Treated them all like privates. Meant nothing for an English sergeant to go and strike a Russian officer."

"Oh come on now!" protested the staff officer, rising in his bed.

"Serves them right," said Dibich, flushing again. "Let their sergeants strike Russian officers, damn it all! What kind of Russian officers are they if they call in foreigners to put down their own people? To hell with them! They deserve a lot more than a sergeant's slap in the face!"

"What's that, Comrade Dibich?" cried the staff officer, dropping his legs over the side of the bed.

The pouches under his eyes darkened and he seemed to become even shorter when he sat up. His flabby cheeks hung down and his face looked enormous.

"Aren't you a Russian officer yourself?"

"No!" cried Dibich. "I'm not a Russian officer! I'm not one of those officers who let themselves be taught by English sergeants! I'm..."

"Don't try to get out of it. Didn't you take the same oath as those officers you're denouncing?"

"Oath?"

Dibich jumped out of bed, wrapping his pea-green, knee-length bathrobe about his emaciated body and holding it tight with his thin hands crossed on his stomach. There he stood barefoot in the middle of the floor, trembling all over and turning his head on his scrawny neck first to the staff officer, then to the sailor.

"An oath? To whom? The order to which I swore allegiance no longer exists. That frees me from my oath. The army to which I swore allegiance no longer exists either. So I'm free from that too. There remains only my country, isn't that so? The land of my fathers. My native land. My oath obliges me to drive off anyone who encroaches on it. I'll stick to that part of the oath. But no army that welcomes foreigners who strike its officers in the face can be said to be true to its oath. And it seems to me...."

Dibich's excited voice broke off and he went back to bed, finishing his sentence in a biting tone:

"It seems to me, Comrade Commander, that if I am not mistaken, you belong to another army...."

"I don't deny it," said the staff officer, somewhat calmer. "But you can't expect all our hundred and fifty million people to think the same. Naturally the foreigners are helping those who think as they do. We speak of the Internationale, don't we? And what is that but foreigners who think as *we* do?"

"But we're not giving away our country to people who think as *we* do."

"Our country's our own business," said the sailor sullenly.

He was sitting on the edge of the bed with his legs wide apart, his huge hands grasping his knees and looking almost black against the white underclothes that were several sizes too small for him.

"It's my business what I do in my own house. I'll give one guest the seat of honour and let another sleep out in the shed. The house was handed down to me from my forebears. They built it and defended it with their blood, and there's nobody going to tell me how to run it! If I invite somebody to come see me, let him act like he was invited. But if somebody sticks his nose in of his own accord, he needn't be surprised if I muss it up for him. I'm not letting a bunch of foreigners lord it over me. I'll live off the bark on the trees before I'll let foreigners make themselves to home on my land."

"Go ahead and live off it if you like it so much," said the staff officer, fussing with his bed preparatory to climbing back in.

"It's not that I like it," said the sailor in an offended tone. "Who'd like living off bark? I'm only saying I'll thank you to let me run my own house, and I'd rather live in my grave than under some foreign sergeant."

Apparently the argument had ended in a draw. But on the following day Dibich wrote Izvekov a short note and waited impatiently for an answer.

Kirill entered the ward with his quick step, stopped in the middle of the room, glanced at the occupants of all the beds, and raised his hand to scratch the back of his head. The man who was smiling a greeting from the cot near the window was not at all the Dibich whom Kirill had once brought out of a faint with valerian drops. He more resembled the former Dibich, the battalion commander who had given private Lomov a telling off in the unfinished dugout. But the present Dibich differed from the battalion commander not only in the fact that he was still much thinner, but also in a certain relaxation which gave his face an almost carefree expression.

"They sure have given you a good overhauling! You look ready to get back in the ranks!"

There was no restraint in Izvekov's voice, and he did not glance warily at the other patients as visitors usually do in hospital wards.

"I myself was thinking it was about time for me to be getting back in the ranks," said Dibich with a smile.

"Oho! But aren't you rushing a bit? Are you really all right? It isn't so easy to get over what you've been through."

"I've been doing gymnastics for a week already. Yesterday I lifted up that chair by the leg."

"The front leg or the back one?"

"The back one."

"Well, when you can lift it by the front one, it'll be time for you to leave the convalescent home."

He gave a loud laugh. The youthful jocularly of their tone drew them together, and for the first time they felt the same age. They began to ask each other where they had gone to school, recalled having played leapfrog during recesses, measuring their strength on belt buckles (making dents in one buckle by striking it with another), and in locked hands (forcing down your opponent's hand with elbows braced on a table).

Suddenly Kirill cried:

"Come on, let's try it now!"

He sat down on the bed opposite Dibich.

They locked their right hands and placed their elbows awkwardly on the mattress. Dibich offered strong resistance, even becoming red in the face with the effort, but gradually his arm gave way, dropping at last on the mattress.

"I told you it was too soon to be leaving the place," said Kirill jovially, turning to the other patients. "Who else wants to try?"

"Out for easy laurels in the convalescent home?" laughed the staff officer.

"I'm not so sure they'll be easy. Here, you come over and try," he said to the sailor from Archangel.

The latter did not answer immediately, as though he were thinking it over.

"What if I take on the two of you at once?" he drawled hesitantly.

"Come on, Comrade Dibich, we'll show him!"

Kirill and Dibich joined hands and placed their elbows on the bed table beside the sailor's cot. The latter took his place opposite them, grabbed both hands in his huge, warm fist, and bent them down to the table as easily as though moving a lever.

On the sailor's open chest Kirill noticed a tattooed heart pierced by an arrow.

"Sailor?" he asked briefly. "What's your name?"

"Strashnov," answered the sailor with a nod.

Once more Kirill sat down beside Dibich's bed and studied the latter with a glance full of inexplicable satisfaction.

"Why don't you ask me which side I want to join?" asked Dibich.

"Why ask? I can tell by looking at you."

Dibich grinned.

"Smart, aren't you?"

"Is it definite?"

"Quite."

"Good. As soon as they let you out of here, come right to me. I'll give you a recommendation. We're going to form some new units. You can help us."

"I was thinking maybe I'd have a chance to pay a visit to my mother first. Just a flying one."

"As you like," said Kirill.

"Will you fix me up with a boat passage?"

"Of course."

For the first time they both became silent.

"Do they let you see the newspapers?" asked Kirill.

"Yes. What's happening at the front?"

"It's in the papers. We've taken Ufa. Now we'll start advancing beyond the Urals."

"And in the South?"

"Things are worse in the South."

"Looks like Denikin's making a decisive attack."

Izvekov glanced at the neighbouring cot. The staff officer was watching him attentively.

"We Bolsheviks are the ones who will do the deciding," said Kirill in a loud voice, waiting to see if there would be a comeback.

The room became even quieter.

"I say that because the people are backing us. Do you agree?"

"Yes," said Dibich.

"There's no question about it. Have you noticed one thing? The people realize that in the essentials we are doing just what they want. That is not a mere coincidence. Our aims serve the historical interests of Russia, and at decisive moments in the life of the people our aims and these interests become one. Take this, for instance: the people wanted to get out of the war, they overthrew the landlords and now they are driving out the interventionists. In every case we supported them, isn't that so?"

Kirill did not take his eye off Dibich's neighbour. He noticed that the latter was watching him with that narrowed gaze which unconvinced listeners always train on a speaker. And suddenly Kirill felt an upsurge of that long unexperienced joy of being a professional propagandist, an occupation to which he had devoted himself for many years, both under his own name and under the

name of Lomov. As he spoke he was glad that Dibich agreed with him, but even more glad that he was irritating the officer. At the front they had called this "putting salt on somebody's tail."

At last he turned directly to the staff officer.

"It seems you are sceptical about what I say."

"I beg your pardon, but you mustn't forget that this is a convalescent home and I have a liver."

"Oh, yes. A serious complaint. . . . Well, then, Comrade Dibich, apparently you'll be going home for a visit, eh?" said Izvekov, getting up.

"I'll come see you as soon as they let me out of here."

"I'll be expecting you. But see you don't overdo it," he said, pointing to the chair. "And don't go casting any glances behind, or you'll be turned into a pillar of salt like Lot's wife," he laughed.

On his way out he stopped for a second beside the bed of Strashnov.

"Would you mind telling me who you are?" asked the sailor.

"I'm Secretary of the Soviet. Izvekov."

"Oh-h-h," said the sailor. "I've heard of you. Hm, of course!"

"Why of course?" smiled Kirill.

"Simply of course," repeated Strashnov, returning the smile and holding out his mighty hand.

They stood there smiling at each other for a second without saying another word, and then Kirill went out.

In spite of the heat he swung along with the lightness that comes after some physical exercise, and suddenly he wanted to see Ragozin.

He found Pyotr Petrovich in his low-ceilinged room, sitting at the samovar in front of the open window. It was stuffy, the flies were swarming, and the throbbing sky was veiled by clouds of dust driven from afar.

"I've been sitting here sweating and dreaming of going off to the sands. Simply haven't the strength to resist."

"Go for a swim? You don't say! You must be a mind reader. Just what I've been longing to do!" said Kirill.

"Really?" exclaimed Ragozin. "Then what do you say to this: I know a blessed old man who's got a rod and a line and a kettle and all the rest of it. And he's a friend of a boatman. Let's go have a swim and do some angling and perhaps spend the night in order to try our luck again at dawn. We'll come back in the morning. How about it?"

They agreed that Kirill would go to the garage for the machine, run home to say he would not be back until morning, and go straight to the river-

bank. Meanwhile Ragozin would get together some supplies and the fishing tackle.

Two hours later they met at the pier—Kirill emptyhanded, Ragozin and the old man loaded down with all sorts of equipment. They took a boat with double oars which the old man recommended as being easy to handle—a weathered, ugly old barque which some lover of the classics had once christened “Medea.” Ragozin was eager and excited and hurried to place the things in the boat as though he were afraid that his long-dreamed-of plan might be frustrated at the last moment. When everything was ready he turned to Izvekov and said:

“Don’t you recognize him?”

Kirill looked at the old man. His sunburned face was furrowed with wrinkles which might have been done on purpose. Silver-framed spectacles spanned his large, humped nose.

“Is he the same one?” asked Kirill deferentially.

The sprinkling of freckles on Izvekov’s nose which always increased in the summer, darkened and expanded as he tried to check his smile. He looked more youthful than ever alongside of this imperturbable old man.

“The same one,” answered Ragozin, affectionately placing his arm about the old man’s shoul-

ders, the blades of which stuck out like wings. "It was people like this that enabled us to win. Strong as iron! The Great Conspirator!"

"So that's what you call me!" said the old man, carefully stepping into the boat. "And me thinking my name was Matvei."

"You were the first person who ever called me 'comrade'," said Kirill musingly. "I was only a youngster then."

"And do you know where he is living? Where we used to print our leaflets. At the Meshkovs."

"Under the same roof as his royal highness," said the old man, slipping the rudder line over his head.

"Incidentally, I saw Meshkov recently," continued Ragozin. "He's not what he used to be."

"Not what he used to be, but he's still got his dander up," observed Matvei.

Kirill said nothing. He took his place at the forward oars, Pyotr Petrovich at the second pair, and off they went.

After reaching the centre of the tributary called the Tarkhanka, they started upstream in silence. The smell of decaying fish grew ever stronger. Everything about them was drenched in sun. There was not a spot of shadow on the sands, no change in the dazzling ripples of water, no relief from the

smothering air. With each stroke of the oars the white-hot vault of the sky seemed to expand and recede.

"It's been a long time since I've had an oar in my hands," said Ragozin. "The last time was on the Oka, near Kolomna."

No one answered him. The old man had pushed his glasses up under his cap and was staring ahead with eyes so narrowed that not even the pupils could be seen through the slits. Kirill had closed his eyes and was giving himself over completely to his rowing. When they were passing Green Island he took off his shirt, and his body gleamed with beads of perspiration.

"Careful, or you'll get a bad case of sunburn," warned Ragozin.

Still Kirill said nothing.

They rounded the first sand promontory and headed toward the main stream. The smell of the fish became intolerable; its nauseating sweetness was now mixed with sourness.

Along the riverbank they noticed that the sand at the water's edge was banded with double and triple rows of silver. The row next to the water was pure silver, the second row brownish, while the third was nearly black. Soon it was possible to make out separate fish among the silver, their dry scales shining in the sun.

"Steer away," said Ragozin to the old man. "It's stifling."

"Poor little herring—the workingman's fish," said Matvei, shaking his head. "How much good food gone to waste!"

"Give us time, we'll make up for it," said Ragozin.

"When? It's now people be wanting to eat. Complaining, they are."

"Some people do nothing but complain."

Rowing became more difficult. They were nearing the main stream, and they had to exert all their strength. Ragozin also took off his shirt and placed his soaked handkerchief under his cap. The old man steered straight against the current to prevent it from pushing the boat to shore. When they rounded the last promontory and the expanses of the Volga itself opened up before them, Matvei let go of the rudder line and the boat was carried downstream.

"Time out!" cried Ragozin, and raised his oars so high that the water came dripping into the boat. He hung his legs over the handles and said to Kirill:

"You sure can row, youngster."

They all became quiet—resting, and giving themselves up to the motion of the boat as it slipped down the current. A hot but fragrant wind

blew from the steppes of the left bank. Here on the main stream one had a sense of utter freedom and boundless space.

The old man chose a narrow passage into shallow backwater. As soon as they landed, Ragozin and Kirill went for a swim. They tried to tempt Matvei to join them, but he claimed he had done his share of swimming in his day and now was interested only in soaking his corns.

"He probably doesn't know how to swim," teased Pyotr Petrovich.

"You just start calling for help, then you'll see whether I know how to swim or not..."

Kirill and Ragozin swam in the Volga fashion—overhand. Pyotr Petrovich first stuck his face under the water so that his bald spot shone in the sun. He came up snorting and blowing the water into a fountain, and with a cry of "Oho-ho!" again disappeared under the surface. Kirill struck out evenly and was soon far ahead. Their arms flashed in the sun like the polished spokes of slow wheels.

After the swim they divided up the work. The old man went off to find minnows for bait. Ragozin got the lines ready. Kirill was sent to gather brushwood for the campfire. All of these tasks consumed considerable time. The minnows were very elusive, darting from one place to another in

whole schools; the woods were on a ridge of sand some distance away; the receding river had carried away almost all the brush and it was difficult to break branches from the bushes; the corks kept breaking off the fish lines and new hooks had to be attached. Each of the men sweated over his task.

The sun was already low when they began to bait their lines. They set four lines with about a hundred hooks, and the baiting of them proved a big job. The minnows died from the heat, and by the time they had baited the last hooks, the minnows on the first were floating belly up and the bait had to be changed.

At last Ragozin swung out the sinker of the last line. With the greatest satisfaction the three of them watched the minnows one after another leave the bank in the wake of the sinker, flashing through the air and disappearing under the surface. At the very edge of the water the men stuck twigs into the sand and tied their lines to them, adding a tiny bell to the top.

"The end line on the right is yours, Kirill," said Ragozin. "The end line on the left is mine, and the two in between are Matvei's. Now for a cup of tea!"

At sunset they were lounging about the fire, sipping tea that tasted of smoke. The wind had died down and myriad colours played over the

calm surface of the river. For a long time the men kept a pleasant silence. Perhaps they were recalling the happiest moments in their lives, or perhaps the anglers were carrying on a conversation that required no words. When the old man finally began to speak, it was more like a continuation than a violation of the silence.

"Right you were when you said some people liked to complain, Petrovich. Far back as I can remember I been hearing people complain. The price of oats too high. Not enough snow to cover the winter crops. Not enough feed for the cattle. Only one pair of hands and a dozen mouths to feed. Too little land. Too much rain. Everything rotting in the fields. Too much sand in the soil. Too much clay in the soil. Everything withered to the very roots. The rent too high. The kulak squeezeing the guts out of you. No way to earn extra cash. The house falling down. Prices going up. . . ."

"It was all true," said Kirill.

"True enough, but the thing be to change this truth. And once you set to work trying to change things—phwit!—your complainers all melt into thin air. No help to be got from them."

"Well, what would you like?"

"It's many things I'd be liking. Among others, I'd be liking to have people stop complaining and set themselves to changing what's wrong."

"They have to be shown an example. And we'll do that."

"Be better to say: we're doing that," said Ragozin. "We've already accomplished a thing or two."

"Of course," agreed Kirill. "But at present we're only establishing new human relations, and Matvei is talking about the conditions of daily life."

The old man laughed softly.

"You wouldn't be expecting a chaffinch to sing before you fed it, would you now? It's the seed as feeds the bird's song, isn't it? So you've got to teach people to sing and sow and fight the enemy, and think about everything all at once."

"It's a little early to think about everything," said Ragozin, "though we realize the importance of it. Our enemies aren't giving us a chance right now."

The old man became silent, perhaps because he had no more to say, or perhaps because he could not think of a suitable answer. But presently he added:

"Back there in the boat, now, I kept thinking to myself: here they are out for a rest, like as if the work was all done, when there's still so much left to do! Just think of all the dirt has to be cleaned up—tsk, tsk, tsk!"

"Descartes claimed that the earth was a sun covered with dirt," said Kirill without addressing anyone in particular.

The old man got up and stretched slowly as he replied:

"Who might he be now? Some scientist or other? So far as the sun goes, we'll leave that to the scientists. But as for the dirt—anybody can see that!"

Suddenly shading his eyes from the setting sun, he cried:

"Who be coming?"

A man in a large straw hat was walking quickly along the edge of the water. Two little boys kept running ahead or falling behind, spinning flat stones across the surface of the river and seeing who could make the most "jumps" before the stones sank. Their voices could already be heard counting the jumps, speeding up toward the end as the intervals decreased: f-i-ve, six, seven, eightnineten!"

Suddenly Ragozin jumped up.

"Look! Well I'll be. . . ."

He took a step forward, calling out:

"Of course it's him! Arseni Romanych!" He ran clumsily through the sand to meet him.

"Arseni Romanych!" he cried.

The boys also came running, but stopped in some confusion before they reached Ragozin and

turned back to Dorogomilov, who was hurrying after.

"Hallo!" laughed Ragozin, immediately recognizing Pavlik and Vitya. "Let's have a look at that friend of yours you were so worried about!"

They ran back and grabbed Arseni Romanovich by the hands. He ran a few steps with them, and then stopped in the same confusion they had shown.

He took off his hat to adjust his hair, or rather to more completely muss it up, and began to shift his feet, obviously embarrassed that his Russian blouse was tucked inside his pants, which were precariously supported by an old pair of suspenders.

"No crime if we kiss each other," said the beaming Ragozin. "How are you, old friend?"

They kissed. The boys hopped in ecstasy (they had never before seen Dorogomilov kiss anyone) and each tried to be the first to give Ragozin his dirty hand.

"I hope you will forgive these little rascals what they have done, Pyotr Petrovich," said Dorogomilov, who was overwhelmed by happy embarrassment. "And I beg you not to think that I . . . that is, it was not I who had the idea, that—er—they should come to you . . . er . . . on that absurd

business.... It was they themselves, all themselves...."

"But Pyotr Petrovich already knows we did it ourselves, Vitya and me...."

"Just a second, let me explain...."

"There's nothing to explain! Nothing at all!" interrupted Ragozin. "I know everything. The only thing I don't know is why you have kept hiding from me, eh? The devil only knows how busy I am. But *you*...?"

"That's just the point, just the point!" exclaimed Dorogomilov. "That's why I'm so ashamed that they should have...."

"Forget it! What are you doing here on the main stream?"

"Came fishing. Our boat's back there," answered Pavlik with a wave of his hand. "We set nine rods after lunch and haven't caught a single thing. Won't bite for anything today!"

"You setting lines?" asked Vitya.

"Baiting with minnows?" added Pavlik.

"Worms are no good for bait now, are they?" asked Vitya.

Thus they showered their questions without giving the grownups time to answer until they reached the fire, when Ragozin said:

"Well, now for the formal introductions. Tell us your names."

And the boys replied correctly, as though in school: Vitya Shubnikov, Pavel Parabukin.

Kirill started at this amazing juxtaposition of names, as though they had been purposely brought together. He greeted the boys without a shade of his usual quick self-assurance. He was struck by Vitya's face, whose childish features revived so many elusive memories.

"Isn't your mother called Elisaveta Merkur'yevna?"

"Yes," replied Vitya timidly. "Do you know her?"

"Are you her only child?" asked Kirill after a slight pause.

"Yes. Uncle Matvei lives with us."

"Meshkov's grandson," explained the old man with a nod toward Vitya.

Ragozin kept an attentive eye on Kirill, but the latter seemed to be absorbed completely in the children.

"Have you been friends long?" he said, turning to Pavlik and studying him as intently as he had studied Vitya.

"We've always been friends, haven't we, Arseni Romanych?" answered Pavlik boldly.

As he spoke with the boys, Kirill was ever conscious of the presence of Dorogomilov, and he had the feeling that Dorogomilov was waiting to

catch his eye and was also peculiarly conscious of Kirill's presence. However shocked he had been by meeting the son of Lisa and the brother of Annochka simultaneously, he purposely drew out the conversation with the boys in order to take himself in hand and calmly return the expectant glance of Arseni Romanovich. He vaguely remembered this man, but from early childhood he had harboured an involuntary dislike for him which later, when he learned how his father had perished, grew into secret hostility. In his childhood he had approved of the street urchins who called Dorogomilov "Old Shaggy Locks," and in his own mind he never called him anything else.

"And now let me introduce you to Dorogomilov," said Ragozin impressively.

"Iz-ve-kov," replied Kirill, pronouncing each syllable with cold harshness as he stared Old Shaggy Locks in the eye and saw a waxen pallor spread over his disturbed features. Then to his own unspoken question he gave the mental answer: Guilty. And he wanted to ask aloud, that all might hear: "Would you mind telling me where my father was drowned?" Or more viciously: "Where did you drown my father?"

But as soon as he felt Arseni Romanovich's eager, trembling handshake, he was sobered by another question that came to his mind, namely:

Does not one who has survived an accident always experience a sense of guilt toward those who have perished? Can such a person know peace of mind, even if at the time he made every effort to save his companions?

"It was only because of Arseni Romanovich that I got away with my life back there in 1910, Kirill," said Ragozin, still in a state of excitement.

"Dear me, what are you saying!" exclaimed Dorogomilov, waving his hat in protest. "Nothing of the sort! I beg you not to say such a thing!"

His pallor was now replaced by the high colouring of old age, and he suddenly changed to a ceremonial tone that showed he was deeply moved:

"Allow me to say what's on my mind in your presence" (his glance kept darting from Ragozin to Kirill) "for the sake of these boys. Here, my little friends" (he drew Pavlik and Vitya together with the affectionate and authoritative movement of a teacher) "take a good look at these men and remember them for all time. They are devoting their lives to ensuring your happiness now and in the future. To seeing that when you grow up, life will be free of the difficulties and injustices which formerly existed and which you yourselves still come in contact with. They want to make the world as pure as that evening sky. I hope you will forgive me ... I am a little..."

He broke off, turning to the sunset and walking off a step or two as he coughed into his hand.

Kirill suddenly noticed a remarkable resemblance between this dishevelled old man and the booklover who had infected him with his enthusiasm during Kirill's exile, and he gave a sigh of relief.

The boys fixed a serious gaze on him. Then, almost without pause, Vitya followed up Dorogomilov's unexpected speech with the question:

"Uncle Matvei, how's it better to hook the minnows—through the back, or through the mouth?"

Ragozin laughed and pushed his little comrades towards the fire.

"Move over here to the tea and we'll decide which is the best way," he said.

At this moment a trifling event took place which did more to break down estranging barriers than the most intimate talk could have done.

Scarcely had they seated themselves about the fire than Vitya sat up on his heels and cried:

"A bite!"

Everyone turned to the lines simultaneously. The motionless twigs were clearly etched against the glowing surface of the water. Suddenly the end twig was jerked down and then sprang back, while the tiny bell gave a jingle.

Vitya, Pavlik, and Kirill were the first to jump up. Ragozin grabbed them and pulled them back.

"Give it a chance to bite," he said in an awe-inspiring whisper.

But when he had pulled the boys down and was tugging at Kirill's sleeve to make him sit likewise, he himself bent over as though about to leap into the abyss, and with raised brows and popping eyes began to move away from the fire without straightening up. He advanced like a spider, on extended arms and legs, while the boys and Kirill set out after him on all fours. The rear was brought up by Arseni Romanovich, one of whose suspenders had been unable to stand the strain and was now dangling between his legs.

Once more the twig jerked and trembled, sending out a nervous little ring of the bell. Without taking his eyes off the twig, Ragozin made wild gestures to keep the others back, while he himself moved ever faster to the water's edge.

When he was within five steps of it he came to a halt. The little bell grew silent. The other anglers stopped in the most extraordinary and uncomfortable poses. Arseni Romanovich made a hasty effort to fix his suspender. From the distance came the chug of a motor. The twig remained motionless.

Suddenly it was bent far over and the taut line vibrated above the water, sending off showers of sparkling drops.

"It's bit for good!" yelled Ragozin in an unrecognizable voice, and threw himself at the line.

Everyone else came rushing up. He grabbed the line, swung it to one side, then stepped back and waited, feeling what was happening under the water.

"Matvei! Bring the net!" he cried.

The old man came with the net over his shoulder, moving his stiff legs through the sand with difficulty.

Kirill paled and said to Ragozin:

"Give it here. It's mine. Yours is at the other end."

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," said Ragozin, holding Kirill off with his elbow and struggling to draw the line out of the water. "Have to go easy or you'll lose it."

"Hand it over!" repeated Izvekov entering the water and impatiently grabbing the line out of Ragozin's hands. Pyotr Petrovich went in up to his knees and took hold of the line further up.

"You'll lose it, I tell you! Easy! Easy! The line'll break!"

He let up on the line for a minute and then began slowly drawing it in. The baited hooks be-

gan to emerge, swinging in the air and becoming tangled about the line.

"It's a whopper!" cried Kirill boyishly, his eyes glued to the taut line as he involuntarily held out his hands.

"Matvei! Hold the net!"

The old man was already soaking his corns in order to slip the net under the line, stirring up the sand of the river bottom with the metal hoop to which the net was fastened.

The fish churned up the water first to the left, then to the right of the line. The anglers assumed that it must be a colossal catch, so furiously did it thrash and plunge.

"Ease up a bit more," advised the old man.

Ragozin let out the line and glanced over his shoulder at Kirill. Suddenly he held out the line to him and said:

"Here, take it if you want."

Kirill began hauling it in so vigorously that the hooks tossed from side to side, one of them catching on his sleeve, another on Matvei's shirt.

"Careful!" shouted the old man.

But at that moment the water rose in a cascade.

Through the foam only two steps away from the fishermen flashed the tail of a fish like a honed knife. Matvei placed his knee under the net, pushed down with his right hand and pulled up with

his left. The monster splashed about in the water streaming from the net.

"There it is! There it is!" shouted four voices at once. They belonged to Vitya, Pavlik, Kirill, and Arseni Romanovich, who was running in circles on the beach. They kept raising the net in the water until Kirill lifted out a struggling pike with a white belly and blue-brown back. He held it up and wiped his perspiring face on his sleeve as he said rapturously:

"Seven pounds at least!"

Ragozin took the fish and weighed it in his hand.

"No more than five," he said.

Matvei repeated the process.

"Not an ounce over three and a half."

The boys began pulling the tail of the pike and Arseni Romanovich gave them a lecture on why they should never put their fingers in the mouth of a pike even if it was half dead.

During the excitement of the catch no one had noticed that the sound of the motor boat had been growing louder. The old man was the first to draw their attention to it.

"Sounds like it was turning in here."

"What do we care?" asked Ragozin.

"Wonder whose boat it could be?" mused the old man, screwing up his eyes.

"All the same to us," insisted Pyotr Petrovich.

They returned to the fish. To be sure, it was hardly enough to make good chowder, but for one thing, the sun had not yet gone down and the fish were just beginning to bite, and for another, fishermen were sober-minded people whose packs were always fuller when setting out than when returning home.

"The boat's turning in here sure enough," observed Matvei once again.

"Well what of it? Afraid they'll scare the fish away?"

"So long as they don't scare us away..."

All eyes turned to the motorboat. It was headed straight for the spot where the lines were set. The water cut away from the bow in foamy cascades, while two rows of receding waves rolled away from the stern. Suddenly the motor was turned off. There was the quiet rush of cleaved water, and then even that sound died away as the boat nosed into the sand, leaving nothing but the echo of the noise it had made.

A young man in a smart uniform jumped out. He ran up to Izvekov, and it was only the sand that kept him from clicking his heels together.

"Zubinsky, with orders from the Military Commissar to bring Comrade Izvekov and Comrade Ragozin back to the city."



"Why?"

"Here's a letter."

Kirill broke the seal and opened the envelope. The Gubernia Committee was summoning him and Pyotr Petrovich to an urgent Party meeting.

Izvekov handed the paper to Ragozin. They exchanged glances and went over to the fire to put on their shoes. When both of them were ready, Ragozin touched Matvei on the shoulder as though to say: "Well, goodbye old man—you see how it is!"

"I understand," muttered Matvei. "When something happens, you can just throw me overboard."

"Come on now, no sulking," laughed Ragozin and was about to take the old man's hand when he felt someone grab his own elbow.

Arseni Romanovich, in a state of the greatest excitement, drew Ragozin off to one side and whispered hastily, without taking his eyes off Zubinsky:

"Pyotr Petrovich, you must be careful with that man. He may be an enemy."

"Don't worry, my friend. We're old enough to take care of ourselves. Please help Matvei with the boat and the lines if you can manage it."

"What about the pike?" cried Pavlik.

Ragozin drew the boy to his side, pushed his thumb against the child's peeling nose, and looked him straight in the eye:

"The pike is yours. You can make chowder for everybody if you wish, or you can eat it up all by yourself."

He playfully pushed Pavlik away.

Kirill, Ragozin, Zubinsky and the fellow running the motorboat shoved it off the sand. As soon as it was afloat they jumped in. Zubinsky immediately began to dry his wet shoes.

The impatient roar of the motor drowned out every other sound. No one glanced back at the sands where in the rosy glow of the sunset the two boys were standing at the very water's edge with the two old men behind them.

Nothing was said on the way. The prow of the boat slapped through the water like a giant palm. Only when the darkly glowing city rose before them did Kirill put his mouth to Zubinsky's ear and shout:

"Have you any idea what's happened?"

"The Cossacks are stirring themselves on the Urals front again."

"In what direction?"

"In the direction of Pugachov, they say."

Zubinsky's shoes were dry by this time and he polished the toe of the right one on the puttees of

his left leg. His face expressed profound concentration.

"How did you know where we were?" shouted Kirill again.

"At the garage they said you'd gone over to the main stream. There'll be a machine waiting at the landing."

As they nosed between the tethered boats, Kirill and Ragozin and Zubinsky were standing on the prow. The shock of the landing almost threw the three of them off their feet, but they recovered and jumped onto the land, running a few steps forward.

There was no machine waiting for them.

"Who promised to send a machine?"

"The garage mechanic Shubnikov," said Zubinsky with aggravation in his voice. "He's late, damn him. I'll run up to the garage, comrades, and you start climbing the hill."

He broke into a run, holding his elbows to his sides like a professional sprinter.

Ragozin and Kirill started climbing at a soldier's pace. It was already dark. Young couples were strolling down the hill towards the lights of the pier. A band was playing, with the drum rolling in measured rhythm.

"Why the devil do they keep that merchant in the garage!" exclaimed Kirill.

"Because he's an expert at his job," retorted Ragozin.

"We're good too," continued Izvekov as though speaking to himself, with no care for logical sequence. "If we hadn't let the Cossacks cross the Volga last year there probably wouldn't be any Urals front now."

"Have you forgotten the situation last year? Three fully equipped regiments swooped down on us. What had we to put up against them in February of last year? The times determine the policy. We would have had to fight the Cossacks sometime anyway."

They stopped to catch their breath after having taken the hill in one rush. The streets at the top were hot and empty. The only suggestions of life came through half-open shutters and from the darkness of the yards.

Ragozin threw an arm about Kirill's shoulder.

"Perhaps this summer will not be the hardest of all, but I'm afraid it will be the hardest we've had so far. Do you think we're equal to it?"

"We have to be," said Kirill.

He gave Ragozin's arm an affectionate tug.

They hastened their steps and said nothing more until they reached their destination.

PROLOGUE TO WAR SCENES

I

A glance at the map of old Russia will show that the Cossack lands stretched like a horseshoe from the Don River in the south, to the Azov and Black Seas, across the North Caucasus to the Caspian Sea in the east, and north from the Caspian along the Ural River. The lands of the Don, Kuban, Terek, Astrakhan, Urals, and Orenburg Cossacks were linked together like a line of soldiers holding hands.

During the civil war, the White Cossack front stretched from one end of the horseshoe to the other. But this front was not uninterrupted. It was cut in two by the lower reaches of the Volga, including the cities of Tsaritsyn and Saratov.

The main purpose of Kaledin, one of the foremost generals of the counterrevolution, was to seize all the territory lying inside the horseshoe. In a letter to Dutov, *ataman* of the Orenburg Cossacks, he wrote: "We must have the Volga at any price. Only then can we strengthen our organization and march on Moscow. Saratov stands in our way. We must concentrate all our efforts on effecting the quickest possible capture of that city. You are the person who can do this most easily. . . ."

So Dutov concentrated all his efforts. During the very first days following the October Revolution he decided to hurl his conveniently located Orenburg division against Saratov, the capital of the Volga region, and ordered his men to take it in twenty-four hours. The *ataman's* order was never carried out. Not only twenty-four hours, but even two months of constant effort proved insufficient to overcome the Red forces defending the city. This represented the first White Cossack front in the Saratov region.

The year 1918 began with a revolt in the South. The Astrakhan Cossacks laid siege to the city of Astrakhan and cut off the railway to Saratov. This represented the second White Cossack front, and it caused the forces defending Saratov to carry the fight beyond the Volga. To the aid of Astrakhan they sent battle-tried units which in Saratov had been given the imposing name of "The Eastern Army." The railway was freed of the rebels and Astrakhan was reunited with the North.

But the White Cossacks of the Don raised their heads. Aided by the Germans who had occupied the Ukraine and crossed its borders in moving to the east, these Don Cossacks began a march on the Volga. Saratov sent men and artillery and a group of forty machine gunners to fortify Tsaritsyn.

This third White Cossack front which developed in the Saratov region during the years of the civil war became the centre of attention on several occasions. Moscow recognized Tsaritsyn as one of the most important Soviet strategic centres. In July, Stalin was placed at the head of its defence. Throughout the entire year of 1918 Krasnov futilely hurled his Don Cossacks against the unconquerable city. It was not only the gallantry of the defenders which stopped the Cossacks at the city walls. Here the Cossack *atamans* and *balki* first came in contact with the new science of military manoeuvring and gunfire. And the fact that the new art of revolutionary military leadership had its birth on those Volga steppelands and on the hills of the right bank was given historical recognition by renaming the city of Tsaritsyn—Stalingrad.

The threat presented by the Don Cossack front led authorities in Saratov to speed up the forming of a regular army out of partisan detachments. The nucleus of this army consisted of selected units operating against the Astrakhan counterrevolutionaries. But this new army was not destined to fight on the Tsaritsyn front.

In the spring of 1918 the Urals Cossacks arrested the members of the Urals Soviet, forced the city to submit to their power, and announced that the time had come to give Bolshevik Saratov a

lesson. And so the new army, also called the Eastern army, left Saratov not for the Don, but for the fourth White Cossack front called the Urals front, on the other side of the Volga.

The war chronicle of that front dates from the spring, when the Soviet forces began a solid movement to the east. Vasili Chapayev led the way over the unpaved roads from Nikolayevsk. The forces from Saratov, Tambov, and Novo-Uzensk followed him by rail. At Altata all these forces united and proceeded across the open steppes, through Semiglavy-Mar, to attack the city of Uralsk. Several enemy regiments were defeated in the battles for Uralsk, but the Whites opened a counterattack, as a result of which Soviet forces retreated almost to their original positions. However, ten days later the Military Council was able to announce at a session of the Saratov Executive Committee that the Soviet attack had been reopened. At that session delegates from a Congress of Toiling Cossacks from Astrakhan declared that the latter had sent an appeal to their brothers, the toiling Cossacks from the Urals, "to expel from our ranks all those who interfere with the setting up of a people's government represented by the Soviets." This fact lent great encouragement to the struggle.

But it was just at this time that events occurred which cancelled the first victories won at

Uralsk and gave the Cossacks time to strengthen their ranks.

When all the main forces had been sent to the Urals front, mutiny broke out among the units remaining in the Saratov garrison. A secret officers' organization joined the Right-wing Socialist-Revolutionaries in provoking one of the batteries to rebel against being sent to the front. The soldiers were given liquor and incited to fist fighting; the representatives to the Soviet were arrested; guns and rifles went off of their own accord. When the disorder seemed to have been put down, a Cossack officer by the name of Victorov came out with a plan for destroying the building belonging to the Soviet, and early one morning opened fire on the city. A detachment of one hundred and fifty workers kept the rebels from attacking the Soviet until the rebellion could be put down by return fire.

Naturally this three-day incident could not affect the war front. But it was a faint forerunner of the tornado of revolts and rebellions which swept through the Saratov region, drawing into its funnel the whole territory of the Middle Volga, then crossing the Urals and invading Siberia.

Echelons of former Czechoslovak war prisoners in alliance with Whiteguard officers seized Rti-shchevo and moved on Saratov and Penza. Mobilized detachments of Saratov workers held them

back, drove them out of Rtishchevo, and together with workers from Atkarsk and Balashov who hastened to the scene, began to recapture towns taken by the Czechs. On the road to Samara, the rebels defeated their pursuers by a blow from the rear. The struggle promised to be a long one.

From the moment that Samara came under the power of the Czechs and the Constituent Assembly, dozens of Saratov volosts were seized by insurgent kulaks. And finally there was an uprising of German colonists along both banks of the Volga.

Saratov possessed dependable battalions which, after putting down these rebellions, were united into the "Volsk Army" and sent north along the Volga in the wake of the Czechoslovakian forces. A Saratov regiment was one of the first to enter Samara after it was taken from the Czechs.

When they had been driven off the right bank, the rebels threatened Saratov from the left. With the aid of troops sent from Samara by the local White government, the Czechs took Nikolayevsk.

Foreseeing the danger, Chapayev turned his cavalry from Uralsk to Nikolayevsk. At the end of the summer, having driven out the Czechs, he completely smashed the forces of the Samara government at Bolshoi Irgiz, not far from his native town of Balakov.

Then the Chapayev division moved on Samara, and in the autumn the Pugachov regiment, the same one which had so gallantly taken Nikolayevsk-Pugachov, broke into the city.

After that Chapayev once more led the Nikolayevsk brigade of his division against Uralsk. The Cossacks had already strengthened their ranks. Near the steppe town of Talovaya they surrounded Chapayev, and only after a desperate engagement did he break through the encirclement and retreat to Pugachov.

This was the situation beyond the Volga at the beginning of 1919.

The mobility of the Urals front in that incomparable year of history, in that most mobile of all wars, was indeed unsurpassed. Uralsk was taken by the Red Army in February. The White Cossacks retreated into the frozen steppes. Their horses became exhausted, floundering through blizzards day and night, up to their bellies in snow. After spending the autumn and the beginning of the winter studying in the Moscow Military Academy, Chapayev once more led his division in the Uralsk steppes. He moved south, capturing Alexandrov-Gai at the end of February and Slomikhinskaya in the middle of March. He was pursuing the Cossacks in the direction of the Caspian Sea. The route of Chapayev's cavalry was to have cov-

cred hundreds of versts. At the bidding of history, they covered thousands.

The spring break-through of Kolchak's White army to the Middle Volga made it expedient to concentrate all the forces of the revolution on the Eastern front. As early as April, Chapayev's regiments were transferred from the Urals steppes to the Samara steppes in the north, where they participated in the counterattack against the main forces of Kolchak. During Frunze's splendid Buguruslan operation in the middle of May, Chapayev's forces reached Belebei, smashed Kappel's corps, captured the city, and began to move on Ufa. At the beginning of June the Whites were forced to surrender Ufa.

The struggle against the huge forces of Kolchak afforded the Urals White Cossacks a respite, during which they quickly recuperated. In the middle of April they made a raid on Lbishchensk, and towards the end of the month they had surrounded Uralsk. Then began the eighty-day siege of Red Uralsk.

In the middle of June, on the fiftieth day of siege, Lenin sent the following telegram to Army Commander Frunze:

"Please convey . . . to the heroes of the fifty-day defence of Uralsk our request not to lose heart, but to hold on for another few weeks. . . ."

On that very day Frunze ordered Chapayev to lead his division south from Ufa and attack the White Cossacks in order to free the city of Uralsk. Within five days Chapayev's cavalry was already on the march.

The spring operations of the Urals White Cossacks (the siege of Uralsk; their advance in the west to Pugachov and along the railway lines to Saratov) were facilitated not only by the struggle of the Red Army against Kolchak, but also by the fact that part of the Soviet forces had to be withdrawn from the Urals front to cope with the situation in the South.

At the beginning of May, Cossack uprisings broke out along the Don, in the region of Boguchar-Veshenskaya. The Don army, taking advantage of these rebellions, opened a drive in the middle of May, and by the end of the month the Red front was breached by Denikin, who advanced from the Donets basin through Millerovo in the direction of Boguchar.

Denikin was haunted by the dream of his predecessors, Generals Kaledin and Krasnov. This dream was to join forces with the White Cossacks beyond the Volga. He was constantly seeking means of contacting the isolated Urals front. Since February 1919, his staff had kept in constant touch with it. This had been accomplished

either through Baku, which had been seized by the English, or through the port of Petrovsk. From there Denikin shipped the Urals Cossacks money and uniforms, rifles and ammunition, artillery and armoured cars—everything with which the zealous Entente supplied him.

But this was not enough for the Whites. At a moment when they had staked everything on the complete annihilation of the Red Army and the stamping out of the revolution, it was absolutely essential that the Cossack armies join hands across the unconquerable Volga, and at the end of June Denikin ordered the Urals Cossacks to take the city of Uralsk and then advance toward Buzuluk or Samara to carry on operations in the rear of the Red Army in order to aid the fleeing Kolchak.

During those days the sultry Urals steppes rang with the hoofbeats of the Chapayev cavalry pouring in a solid wave southwards from Ufa.

And during those same days several fighters from besieged Uralsk arrived by aeroplane in Samara, bringing the Red Army a letter of greeting from the city's defenders. After expressing their gratitude for promised aid, they reported that during the period of siege they had defeated the enemy in three great battles, had repulsed many lesser attacks, and had not flinched under the con-

stant bombarding of the city. They wrote that they had put down a Whiteguard conspiracy inside the city which was to have hailed General Tolstov with a triumphant ringing of church bells. And they ended their enthusiastic letter with the following words:

"Perhaps you are tempted to ask what weapon the defenders of Uralsk possess which makes them impervious to any attack? And we answer: The weapon of the revolutionary spirit and the knowledge that the fertile fields of Uralsk are of vital importance to our hungry Red capitals, Moscow and Petrograd. . . ."

These words expressed the basic conviction of the people of Russia, who were then carrying on a ruthless fight in the southeast: the revolution needed bread, the revolution needed oil, the revolution could not possibly surrender the Volga to the Whiteguards.

II

For those who study the historical war map in retrospect, those who ~~are~~ are the descendents of eyewitnesses, the map remains a record of incontrovertible facts, but a record which seems much more complicated and intricate than it seemed to contemporaries of the events. The more carefully

you study its fixed zigzags, the more you are inclined to ask why this line or that line was drawn up here, rather than there, and why it shifted at the end of the month instead of earlier or later, and why it finally disappeared entirely, only to be replaced by another.

A contemporary accepts the war map as one accepts the weather of any given day: cloudy in the morning, rain toward noon, then a light wind bringing clear weather. As military operations proceed, details arising at the time impress themselves on the mind, giving living significance to every line drawn on the map. For a contemporary, the theatre of war designated on paper is full of vital meaning; every mark is saturated with blood, suffering, hope, or the triumph of the spirit.

For Kirill Izvekov, the diagram of events—the distribution of forces, scenes of battle, timing of military operations, their scope and importance—lived, as it were, in his subconscious mind. The hourly events of every day were mentally transferred to this living diagram in his subconscious mind, so that Kirill went to bed and woke up in the morning with a general comprehension of what was happening each day. He could not know what would happen on the morrow, but he knew what, in the final analysis, must surely come to pass,

for with all his heart he desired it, and believed in its inevitability.

That evening when Kirill and Ragozin returned from their fishing trip to report to the Soviet, they learned that in a bold raid the Cossacks had seized the town of Pugachov and butchered a Communist detachment consisting of one hundred men. Chapayev, who had left Ufa five days before this event, was rushing his division to the Urals theatre, but his aim was to penetrate deep into the steppes, while Pugachov was only one or two days' march from the Volga, and the Cossack patrols might at any moment cross to the right bank.

That was a year of conscriptions. As soon as one was over, another began. They were held at the bidding of gubernia and even uyezds authorities, as well as by order of the central government. People were conscripted into the army, into food brigades, into the medical service, into labour and defence detachments, into fuel squads. Everyone was conscripted: Communists, workers, doctors, poor peasants, members of trade unions, the bourgeoisie, tsarist officers. One conscription brought an enthusiastic rush of volunteers, another petered out before it had hardly begun. Almost every important event at the front was accompanied by some kind of a military conscription. And almost

every untoward happening—a revolt, a raid, a conspiracy or treason—resulted in the immediate despatching of a hastily conscripted group of fighters to the scene.

The taking of Pugachov by the Cossacks and the new menace beyond the Volga only increased the determination to defend Saratov. Military units which could be sent to the front were immediately selected. It was immediately decided to add a shock detachment to these units. Immediately a list was drawn up of Bolsheviks who were to make up this detachment.

Both Kirill and Ragozin were strangely confident that they would be included in this list. They were led to this conclusion by the fact that they had been searched out in that backwater on the other side of the Volga and brought back to the city in a motorboat, as well as by the air of suppressed excitement at the Party meeting, which was brought to a close late at night with the singing of "You gave your life, a sacrifice ..." in memory of fallen comrades, followed by the Party anthem. Both Kirill and Ragozin were filled with the ardent conviction that they must, and surely would, go to the front as volunteers.

But scarcely had they voiced their desire when they were told that this was categorically forbidden: there could be no talk of leaving their present

posts; the situation did not warrant the conscription of Party workers holding positions of such importance to the gubernia.

"To the gubernia!" cried Kirill. "Something greater than the gubernia is at stake now!"

"And when will you be pleased to consider the situation sufficiently grave to warrant it?" asked Ragozin testily. "Perhaps when they again start pounding away at the Soviet from guns on Ilyinskaya Square? Is that it?"

But their ire was of no avail. A decision had been passed stating that the conscription was not to include heads of departments in the Soviet.

Ragozin could not restrain himself.

"I suppose you can't find some pen-pusher to take my place?" he said. "What's more important at the present—the front, or debits and credits? You'll never make a Minister of Finance out of me no matter how you try! A fine Witte I make! What improvement has there been since you set me to counting the money? Have prices fallen? Have the Kerensky bills gone up in value? Aren't our offices still overstaffed? I haven't even been able to bring order into the accounting—it's such a tangle you could break a leg in it!"

However, his tirade only called forth a few remarks about "not having the proper point of

view" and the necessity of "submitting to Party discipline."

Submitting was easier than enduring the rebukes: how, as a matter of fact, could Izvekov or Ragozin be accused of not having the proper point of view, when their entire point of view was joined indivisibly with the fate of the revolution?

That was what they were thinking and feeling when they left the Soviet and walked silently side by side down the dark streets.

The night was black and cloudy and humid. Probably there would be rain. The silence was complete, but the city seemed rather to be lying in wait than sleeping. It was as though an invisible enemy were watching Kirill and Ragozin with bated breath from behind trees, over fences and roof tops.

Izvekov decided to spend the night with Ragozin, since Vera Nikandrovna expected her son to spend the night on the sands anyhow and Ragozin's house was nearer the Soviet, so that he could get to work earlier in the morning.

They threw open the window, lighted the oil lamp with its round tin reflector (there had been no electricity for some time), and had a supper of a few leftovers. They spread sheets on the floor and lay down naked. But neither of them could

have said what was more responsible for keeping him awake—the heat, or his own thoughts.

The sound of Kirill's tossing and sighing led Ragozin to burst out:

"They used to say, 'Sow the seeds of enlightenment.' A lot of time we have for sowing enlightenment! Fiddling around with a lot of fool jobs..."

Kirill snorted. "Expect someone else to shoo away the mosquitoes while you do the fishing? Oh, no, friend. You've got to bait the hook and chase away the mosquitoes at the same time. Matvei was right."

After a brief pause he went on:

"But what have you to complain about? Nobody's keeping you from sowing enlightenment."

"You think so? Sitting there all day counting Kerenskies and signing my name."

"Why don't you annul those Kerenskies?"

"Kolchak annulled them."

"Looks as though he had more brains than we gave him credit for."

"Oh no, he hasn't. His officers had their pockets stuffed with Kerenskies, so they started a revolt when he annulled them. Not to their taste to be left without a kopek. Well, our muzhiks in the country also have plenty of that lucre. A lot you know about Kerenskies!"

"Since you seem to know so much, you must be in the right place, and apparently you'll have to stay there."

Ragozin got up. It was so dark that Kirill could not even make out his tall white figure. Only when he sat on the window sill could he trace his silhouette against the faint suggestion of dawn.

"Do you think I'm going to sit here juggling figures and waiting for the Whites to appear on Sokol Hill?"

"No," answered Kirill calmly. "If the Whites reach Sokol Hill, there won't be a sign of you in the city."

"Take to my heels, eh?"

"They'll make you evacuate among the first."

"Thanks. You're the one who'll be having to evacuate me, once you're the one who got me into this job. And not me alone, but all my safes in the bargain."

Kirill quickly sat up, his legs crossed like a Turk, and shouted:

"For more than three years I was in the army! I'm used to the army and I consider it my place! Yet they keep me here managing inkwells and blotting paper!"

"What are you trying to say?"

"That I'm no worse than you, but I do what I'm told!"

"Don't I?"

"So why make a fuss about it?"

Kirill grabbed his pillow and lay still until his breathing became more regular—perhaps he was actually falling asleep from exhaustion, or perhaps he was only pretending.

Never had he worked as badly as he did on the following day. Nothing went right. His chest and back were aflame with the intolerable heat—he supposed it was from sunburn. Somehow he managed to drag through the conferences, telephone calls, the reading and checking of papers, until dinner-time, when he phoned for the car and drove home.

At Vera Nikandrovna's he found Annochka. She got up to leave when he entered.

As at other times, he found something very gentle and touching in her shyness.

"But you mustn't go now," objected Vera Nikandrovna. "For one thing, a man's head can be very helpful in this matter, and for another, you must have dinner with us."

However, the man's head only further upset Vera Nikandrovna.

"Did you spend the night on the sands?"

• Kirill was slow to answer.

"No, we came back late, but there was no machine so I spent the night with Ragozin."

"I suppose you couldn't carry the catch?"

"That's right," he exclaimed eagerly. "I caught a pike this big!"

He flung out his arms so far that Annochka stepped back.

"I suppose they'll deliver it on a truck?" she asked seriously.

"On a cart with a trailer, like they haul logs on."

Vera Nikandrovna smiled only to be congenial. The fact that he was so eager to elaborate this joke indicated that he did not want to be asked about more serious things, which in its turn indicated that it was not for nothing the townsfolk were whispering about an urgent Party meeting held the preceding night. Annochka seemed to read the mother's thoughts and came to her aid by remarking:

"They say there's bad news. Is it true?"

"Nothing special," he answered quickly. "What were you holding a conference about when I came in?"

"Annochka was complaining about her brother, and I don't know what to advise her. Tell Kirill, Annochka."

"As though he didn't have enough on his mind without thinking about my Pavlik," she said, again becoming embarrassed.

But he insisted that she tell him—he preferred asking questions to answering them.

It seems that since his mother's death, Pavlik had developed the habit of staying away from home. He spent his time on the streets and the riverbank and in the company of homeless urchins. He even stayed away nights.

"I saw him at the river with Dorogomilov," said Kirill, with an enquiring look at his mother. "There's nothing wrong with being in such company, is there?"

"Arseni Romanovich himself complains that Pavlik has changed. He doesn't even borrow books to read any more."

"What do you expect? Vacation time! I'd spend my days on the Volga too if I had the chance. Lucky fellow!" said Kirill with a sigh of envy.

"That's the whole trouble—if it were not vacation time, the school would have some influence over him," said Vera Nikandrovna sternly, as though addressing the School Council.

"Why should you consult me?" asked Kirill with a smile. "You're the teacher. You know better what to do."

"Pavlik is very difficult to handle," observed Vera Nikandrovna.

"Was I easy?" he asked quickly, and then turned to Annochka. "You don't want him to be a sissy, do you?"

"I don't want him to turn into a street urchin. And that's what he's coming to. I haven't enough time to devote to him and he doesn't respect my authority. The other day he announced that he would run away to the army. What can I do to stop him?"

"I'll go along with him!" laughed Kirill.

Vera Nikandrovna studied her son more seriously than the conversation called for. Undoubtedly he was hiding something important.

"He keeps repeating some silly statement about 'You don't know what life's like!'" said Annochka with a smile.

"Of course you don't!" said Kirill, continuing to laugh. "Every day they bring such little heroes to me at the Soviet. He'll run away all right! He's sure to run away and join the fight!"

"He doesn't listen to his father either. His father wanted to get him a job at the Old Goods Department tearing up books..."

"What do you mean—tearing up books?" interrupted Kirill in surprise.

"Just that. He took Pavlik to the warehouse where they tear up worthless books. Pavlik came running to me almost crying and said: 'There's your revolution for you! You don't know what life's like! Go see how father rips up books!'"

"Books?" repeated Kirill seriously. "This is the first I've heard of such a thing. I'll have to look into it. What could it mean?"

He went over to his bookshelf. It was still empty. Over in the corner lay a pile of newspapers and some twenty or thirty leaflets. On top were some cardboard signs for the different sections. He picked up the cards marked "Economics" and "Fiction," and asked:

"Is it your father who decides which books are worthless and which are not?"

"No, there are experts for that. Father has some other sort of job. But as for father ... he's ill ... you know, that Russian disease..."

"I don't know why you should call it a Russian disease," said Kirill with a short laugh. "Russians aren't the only ones who drink. The English do too. Although what we call the English disease is rickets, rather than rum."

He immediately felt ashamed of this lame joke which he had probably read somewhere, but Annochka burst out laughing that uncontrollable laughter that overwhelms schoolgirls without any particular cause except that the joy of life demands laughter.

Kirill covered his mouth with his hand: it really had sounded funny, the way he had said it, and it was delightful to hear the trills and

cascades of Annochka's laughter. Vera Nikandrovna found the moment convenient for busying herself with the dinner, so she left Kirill and Annochka alone.

He waited until Annochka sobered down. But they were silent so long that Kirill felt embarrassed at finding himself alone with this amazing girl, and in order to overcome his uneasiness, he asked in a very businesslike tone:

"Well, what shall we do about that brother of yours?"

"If my father earned more money, Pavlik would find home more interesting... perhaps he would develop some sort of hobby... or simply stay home because it was attractive..."

"I'll try to do something for your father," said Kirill.

She ran over to the window speechless, covering the back of her head with her hand as though she were ashamed to have Kirill see even that.

"You mustn't be so sensitive," said Kirill, trying to comfort her.

"That wasn't what I meant... Soon I shall be earning money myself, and then..."

"Of course," he answered quickly. "Everything will be all right as soon as your theatre gets on its feet."

"Really?" she said, instantly turning to him with shining eyes. "Will you help us?"

"Of course. And Ragozin too. He realizes that art can't be born of itself. He and I can't put on plays."

"Really?" she cried.

"Certainly. He and I aren't actors."

"I don't mean that!" said Annochka, laughing with excitement. "I mean do you seriously believe in our theatre?"

"You believe in it, don't you? And when I look at you, I can't help believing."

"In it, or in me?" she asked with faint hesitation.

"I can put the same question to you: is it the theatre you believe in, or the people connected with it?"

"That's one and the same thing," she answered after a moment's consideration, then added with a frown, as she seemed to read his thoughts: "Are you thinking of Tsvetukhin?"

He was almost offended that she should have exposed him so, but he answered firmly:

"It seems to me that he is capable of doing very good work, because he is so eager and enthusiastic. But he is just as capable of messing things up, because he is a hopeless day-dreamer."

"Do you imagine that you never make mistakes?" she asked with irritation.

"No, I don't."

"Would you like never to make mistakes?"

"Naturally. I can say that for certain," he replied firmly.

She walked easily about the room, but he could see that she was battling down some unwanted emotion.

"I too should like never to make mistakes, but I know that in the work to which I hope to devote my life it is impossible not to make mistakes."

"In art?"

"Yes."

"Who ever told you that?"

"I have seen how experienced actors work—how they seek for what they want, how it seems that they have found it, but then how they reject it and begin all over again."

"That's true in every field," said Kirill.

She shook her head as though to shame him.

"You yourself do not believe what you say. Almost every profession consists of copying what has already been mastered. But just try to copy in art! It is death to an artist to copy. The one dream of his life is to express himself as distinguished from everyone else, and even from the individual he was yesterday."

"Is that what Tsvetukhin teaches you? I disagree with him. An artist should express all people through himself, and express them as they actually are. Otherwise he will not be understood."

Annochka was thinking hard, concentrating all her attention as though solving a riddle. She even placed her finger on her lips. Suddenly she said quietly and rapturously, as though revealing something she held very precious:

"I agree with you. And Egor Pavlovich would probably agree with you too. But what you say refers to the *purpose* of art: to be understood. And I am speaking about the mistakes made in *achieving* that purpose—the mistakes made in searching, in the work process. No purpose can be achieved without the process of approaching it, isn't that true? And it's in this process that the mistakes are made."

"It's no sin to make a mistake. But why should you repeat the mistakes of others?"

She swung about playfully on her heels.

"Oh no, you don't know Tsvetukhin at all!"

The table was already laid. As she fussed about it, Vera Nikandrovna caught snatches of the conversation distracting her son's attention from his own thoughts, and when they all sat down she exclaimed with satisfaction, as though rejoicing that everything had turned out so well:

"What a little arguer you are! You certainly do love that theatre of yours! Well, go ahead and love it; nobody's stopping you!"

"Of course!" cried Annochka. "Nobody's stopping me because it's the strongest of all feelings! The most vivid! The most complete! The most" (here she caught Kirill's gaze fixed on her with a shade of mischief in his eye, and she immediately became confused) "... the most ... would you mind giving me some soup, Vera Nikandrovna ... what kind is it, shchi?"

This amusing beginning set the tone for the whole meal, which passed in such light banter that Kirill felt he was not only at home, but in a close family circle. He offered to take Annochka back to town in the machine, and she eagerly jumped into the Mercédès, which was still imposing in spite of its scars.

The wind blew hot, but refreshing. She said not a word as she gave herself up to this new experience of speed. The bumping of the car over the ruts in the road only increased the illusion of flight.

Kirill watched her out of the corner of his eye. The curve of her fine nostrils became wider and sharper; she held her head boldly against the wind; her delicate neck seemed to become longer and to express in its graceful lines all the naive loveliness of her girlhood. As he watched

her he kept hearing her artless, singing cry:
"...the strongest of all feelings! The most vivid!
The most complete!"

They struck a particularly bad bump which caused the instruments somewhere inside the car to clatter merrily and Annochka to fall hard against Kirill's knee. She immediately straightened up, but he caught her hand and tried to hold it. She turned her head and snatched her hand away.

"So that's what you're like!" said Kirill.

She continued to remain silent, still absorbed in the dizzying sensation of speed, and only toward the end of the ride did she seem to come to herself and say:

"How can you know what I'm like? You've probably never given me a thought, but I know all about you."

"All?" he repeated.

"About how you were in jail, then how you lived in exile and finally went to the war."

"That's not all," he teased.

"Well, what else? About Lisa Meshkova? I know about her too. So you see I know everything!"

She turned to him for the first time during the ride. Her face expressed a roguish curiosity, and he unexpectedly dropped his eyes.

Now it was time for her to get out. In the second during which the machine stood at the

curb he wanted to tell her so much about himself that he was unable to find a single suitable word.

"Let's see each other again," he said, holding out his hand to her as she stood on the sidewalk straight and slim, her hair blown by the wind and her short dress dazzling white in the sun.

"Let's," she said.

"How about coming to mother's the day after tomorrow, in the evening?"

"All right." She nodded, and disappeared around the corner of the house.

During the next two days Kirill worked enthusiastically, but the more work he had, the slower dragged the hours, and when evening came he asked himself wonderingly why he had ever made the appointment for the day after tomorrow instead of for today or tomorrow? "You've lost your head, young man—lost your head!" he teased himself.

He was familiar with that endless drag of time. Long ago, in days almost forgotten, hours of enforced idleness had been filled with brooding over lost hopes. This had been true when he was in exile among the Olonets forests as well as later, during the years in Sormovo, when he had to feign being the dull, hard-working draughtsman Lomov. At that time his feelings vented themselves in a longing for Lisa.

At present he felt something similar, yet new and different and tinged with impatience. There were other points of comparison: in those days his longing for Lisa had led him to think about Tsvetukhin; now too, his thoughts of Annochka were mingled with thoughts of Tsvetukhin. But whereas formerly his conflict with Tsvetukhin had been an illusion growing out of his premonition of danger, now Tsvetukhin seemed to him a real menace, though he could not understand why.

On the night before his appointment with Annochka, Kirill lay before the open window looking up at the motionless, starry sky and demanding of himself an explanation for this strange feeling.

First of all he decided that he felt no hostility toward Tsvetukhin as a person. On the contrary, Tsvetukhin was doing just what was to be expected of an actor in revolutionary times. True, Kirill himself did not know just what should be done in art. But he knew that art should be allied with the revolution—should be on the same side of the barricade. Tsvetukhin shared that point of view, which meant that he was a natural ally. From this it followed that Kirill had been right in promising to support Tsvetukhin.

But in supporting him, he was supporting Annochka's craving for the theatre. Well, what was wrong with that? On the contrary, that was

splendid! Youthful enthusiasm! Youthful devotion!... Ah, yes. But Kirill Izvekov could not oppose an endeavour which was right in principle for the sake of personal considerations. That would violate the entire moral and intellectual make-up of Izvekov. And in the final analysis, just what were these personal considerations? And what made Kirill conclude that they were personal? Had he developed any personal feeling for Annochka? Even if he had, even if this feeling had come swooping down on him like the wind, like a storm, like a typhoon, damn it all... even so, Kirill could never mix up two very different things; the social and the personal. Thank goodness he did not suffer from lack of will power!

This was especially true in view of the fact that it was uncertain how Annochka might react to his personal considerations. She might object. She might have her own personal considerations. She might simply ask what right Kirill had to interfere in her life? If she loved Tsvetukhin... Hm, there was the hitch! If she loved Tsvetukhin, then by helping Tsvetukhin he was sponsoring her love. It was not revolutionary art he was sponsoring, but the romance of an actor already well on in years—that, and nothing more!

Kirill had always despised that poser, that idol of the women, that Adonis. The devil with

him and his talent! To get mixed up with his studio was the last thing in the world Kirill wanted. Why should he? So that Annochka could ruin her life in order to give this vain coxcomb his latest thrill? One more victim? Actually it was remarkable the way everything repeated itself: one after another these dear, delightful girls threw themselves into the flame.

How charming Annochka was! What music rang in her laughter! Now irresistible that quick, light turn of her head! How intriguing her manner when she was angry, or thoughtful, or embarrassed! Or when she began to argue!... As though she could be compared to Lisa! What, in fact, had Lisa been like? Kirill could not remember. Had there, indeed, ever been any Lisa? Kirill did not know. What had been uppermost in his love for Lisa? Had she constantly drawn him to her? Could she have lured him throughout the oppressive heat of the night as Annochka did?

"Damn it all, when will this heat let up?" said Kirill, going over to the window.

Should he take a drink of water? Or a sponge bath? The water itself was as warm as his bed. There was not a breath stirring beyond the window. The air was motionless, the city was motionless in unwholesome sleep, the stars were motionless in the sky, the whole heaven was motionless. You

could stare hours on end into its warm, bottomless depths without discovering the slightest sign of relief. Nothing but stars. Only stars. Eternity. The future. The changeless always.

"Always," said Kirill as he tossed the remaining drops from his cup out the window.

Always someone else would stand in his path. Someone alien and unpleasant and unwanted. Some Tsvetukhin or other. It was horrid to feel that you were his rival. It was horrid to pronounce even to yourself so vulgar a word as "rival." It was a good thing that this word did not cling to the mind, but was easily replaced by a name so full of tender yearning as "Annochka." Slowly and persistently this gentle word smothered all other feelings. Smothered them, immersed them in the pool of desire, lured him to sleep...

Finally came the longed-for day after tomorrow. Annochka had not yet arrived when he drove up to his mother's door and dismissed the car.

"You're home early today," said Vera Nikandrovna.

She noticed some change in her son, but could not guess its cause.

"I'm a little tired—want to take a walk," he replied.

His words meant that he had something on his mind and was not in a talkative mood. That again

he was hiding something important from her. That she must ask no questions, but torture herself with guessing.

And then something occurred which was trifling, but so illuminating that not only a mother, but even a disinterested person would immediately have realized what was wrong with him.

Annochka arrived, as merry and lively as ever, and kissed Vera Nikandrovna on the cheek as usual (only this time, as Vera Nikandrovna later recalled, the kiss was the least bit more impulsive), and began to speak about her own affairs.

Without giving her time to finish, Kirill announced that he had just been about to go for a stroll, and wasn't it splendid that fate had sent him such an agreeable companion.

"Wouldn't you like to take a walk up to the melon farm with me?" he asked.

And probably it was fate that winked to Vera Nikandrovna from out of some corner, so that the load was immediately lifted from her heart and she said jokingly:

"Don't go too far, because there's a lunatic asylum on the other side of the farm."

"Just the thing!" laughed Annochka. "Kirill Nikolayevich thinks that's the only place for a person with my ideas. He probably arranged things purposely."

"That's right—fixed everything up," he said as he led her out of the room.

"Fixed everything up, fixed everything up . . ." repeated Vera Nikandrovna to herself with a sense of relief as she saw them to the stairs.

It was difficult to keep herself from watching at the window to see them go down the evening street, keeping a slight distance so as not to accidentally touch each other, then disappear around a distant bend in the road. It was difficult to keep her mind from following them as they went on past the houses and the long, broken fences banked with nettles and burdock, under the railway bridge, on and on along the dusty road until they reached the open spaces where the wind blew free. It was difficult to keep herself from guessing what they would talk about in those open spaces, among the red-brown furrows where the melon vines twined, with the green and black striped balls of the fruit hidden in their tangle.

Actually what did Annochka and Kirill talk about? Both of them were lithe and loved to move quickly, but now it was as though their weight were doubled; they shortened their stride and seemed to have lost their taste for quick walking. They strolled along the edge of the path bisecting the farm, sometimes catching their toes in melon creepers, occasionally waving the willow wands they

had cut to chase away the gnats swarming about their shoulders. The distant hills had already grown dark against the flame of the sunset. The colours had cooled on their slopes, though the earth still smouldered, and the green of the fields absorbed the yellow glint of the earth and the lavish glow of the sky. And while it seemed that the steps of Kirill and Annochka lagged and it was an effort for them to beat away the gnats, actually both of them were glad to be walking and both were enjoying the silence.

They stopped under a broken willow with a crown like a broom. Next to them was an old, squeaky Persian wheel, which was being turned by a one-eyed gelding whose legs were swollen with heaves. The buckets would descend to the bottom of the well and slowly be drawn to the surface, the water sieving through their holes with a patter as of rain. The trough into which the water was poured, as well as the wooden irrigation gutters leading to the farm, were dilapidated and leaking, and filled the air with refreshing moisture and the pleasant odour of rotting wood.

The old man who was overseer of the farm found an early melon the size of two fists. He tested it by listening to the sound it made when squeezed, tossed it into the air, caught it, and held it out to Annochka.

"Here, young lady—try our first crop."

Kirill cut the melon with a short little knife which the old man first wiped on a coat lying on the ground. The fruit was firm and sweet—pale pink, with a sprinkling of amber seeds.

Annochka sat down on the coat and began to eat, spitting out the seeds and noisily sucking up the juice. Kirill stood next to her, also eating and handing her fresh slices when she threw away the empty rind. Like a little child she smeared "moustaches" on her face, and Kirill laughed at her, still without saying a word.

After a brief rest they started back. The colouring of the sky, of the hills on the left and the expanses of the Volga on the right was constantly changing. Gradually the earth settled down to a brief, light sleep.

"Haven't we been quiet too long?" asked Annochka.

"Apparently we don't want to talk, so why force ourselves? You won't tell me anything about yourself and you know all about me."

"Are you annoyed at my having said—that I knew all about you?"

He did not answer, and she looked at him with the growing curiosity with which a woman looks at a man whose heart she is about to test.

"Don't you know that when I was a little girl I used to deliver your letters to Lisa for you?"

One of his shoulders twitched.

"Is it true that you haven't even seen her since you returned?"

"Yes."

"Why not?"

"When I wanted to see her, it was impossible. When it became possible, I no longer wanted to."

"She loved you very much."

Again Kirill said nothing.

"Once when I was speaking with your mother, she said that Lisa was too weak in character to bring happiness to a strong man."

"Perhaps the strong man might have made her strong too?" said Kirill.

She pondered the idea, drawing her brows together as was her habit.

"Depending on whether she submitted to him or not?"

"Depending on whether she trusted him or not. The weak should trust the strong."

It seemed to her that he was surprised to hear himself talking this way, as though being with her revealed a new and gentle aspect of his nature with which he himself was scarcely familiar. A question broke impulsively from her lips:

"Do you like to have people fear you?"

He was embarrassed. He raised his hand to his mouth, and without removing it said softly:

"Forgive me, but—that is a stupid question."

She smiled, but answered with stubborn conviction:

"Yes, you do like it. I know. And it isn't a stupid question..."

Twilight was falling, and the light of the day was red-brown, like dry pine needles. Whole choirs of chirping grasshoppers began their evening concert. The air was filled with the odour of hot clay and of the pastures from which the cattle had just been driven.

"On an evening like this it is possible to speak without words," said Kirill.

"Do you find that I am chattering too much?" asked Annochka lightly.

"Go ahead and chatter. I like to listen to you."

But they passed the fields and entered the edge of the settlement without saying a word.

As soon as they turned the corner of their street they saw the lights of an automobile signalling in front of the school. Kirill stopped for a second, and then with sudden conviction said:

"They've come for me."

A sense of alarm caused them to quicken their steps.

As soon as the driver saw Kirill, he ran toward him and took an envelope out of his cap.

"Turn up the lights."

In the flood of the light it seemed to Annochka that Kirill's hands did not quite obey him. As soon as he had read the note he said:

"I'm off."

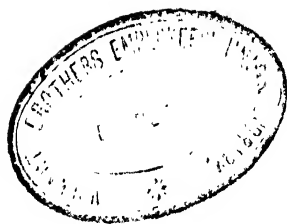
He put his foot in the car, but then turned and took Annochka's hand, saying:

"You're the only person I'm telling this to, understand? Tsaritsyn has fallen."

He jumped in and drove away without looking back.

At that moment Vera Nikandrovna came out of the house. With an effort to speak calmly she asked what had happened.

"I don't know," replied Annochka. "He didn't say."



Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

